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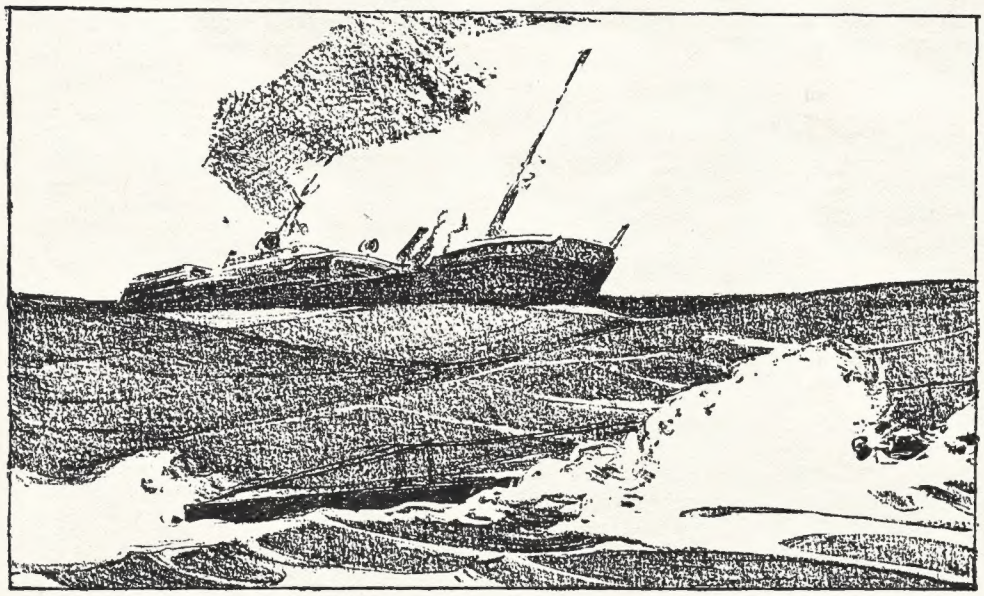
A Novelette by the Author of "Pigboats"



"SHAKE a leg now! Another hundred tons and we're off!"

A shrill blast on his whistle, Lieutenant Blake sprang clear of the inrushing trucks; a gang of bluejackets leaped forward, started shoveling coal like mad into the yawning canvas bags, straining to clear the deck before the next clamshell bucket swung over and disgorged its load on their heads.

Blake, his face caked with coal dust and furrowed with sweat, his eyeballs fiery red from constant irritation, his once white uniform as black as his face, grinned approvingly as the mountain of coal piled on the deck melted away before the onslaught of the flying shovels, glanced again over his shoulder at the scoreboard hanging against the port boat crane. A hundred and eighty tons last hour for the Third Division.

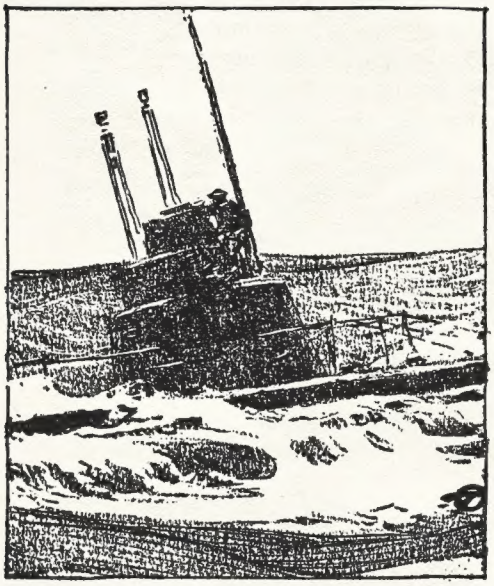
A distant rumble; he faced hastily outboard. A huge steel clamshell whipped up out of the dark hold alongside, rose high above his head, hung a moment, swinging violently amid a forest of steel booms and singing cables, then to the groaning of the winches and the shrill whine of the trolleys, it shot over the rail of the collier *Ulysses*, poised a moment above the deck of the battleship *Texas* while the sailors below jumped clear.

Another blast on Blake's whistle; the steel jaws opened, half a ton of coal dropped out, hit the deck. Still enveloped in a cloud of dust, the empty jaws snapped to, the hurtling bucket trolleyed inboard, dropped like a plummet into the black hold of the collier for its next bite.

Once more the grimy sailors leaped in, shoveled frantically to load the bags on the next set of trucks.

The deck of the U. S. S. *Texas* hummed with action. From bow to stern, under the overhanging booms of the collier alongside, mounds of coal littered the deck, constantly replenished by the flying clamshells from the *Ulysses*, constantly melting before the shovels of the deck

and "On the Bottom"



CARGO TO NEWCASTLE

By

COMMANDER EDWARD ELLSBERG

force as they heaved it into bags, feeding the endless streams of little trucks that circled the deck, hauling the coal from underneath the booms to the numerous scuttles yawning all over the main deck, down which the coal poured in a steady torrent into the bunkers far below the warship's armor belt.

Clouds of black dust wreathed the *Texas*, smudged the superstructure, crunched on the wood deck under the little wheels of the hurrying trucks; filled the nostrils, the eyes of the sweating sailors, filtered through their blackened clothes, caked their skins from head to foot. No one would have recognized in the grimy vessel or its blackened crew the trim warship or the neat bluejackets of three hours before, when the *Ulysses* had first nosed her way gently alongside the *Texas* and, in a flurry of heaving lines and straining hawsers, made fast and rigged out her coaling booms over the spotless battleship.

Well, it was nearly over. With relief Blake watched the yeoman chalk up the tally for the third hour—twenty-two hundred tons of coal already aboard and mostly stowed below; only five hundred tons more now, just another hundred tons of it for the Third Division to stow, and the *Texas* was through, filled chock-a-block. And that settled it for the squadron too. They were the last ship. Astern of him, a few hundred yards off, he could see their sister ship, the *New York*, which the *Ulysses* had coaled just before coming to them. Geysers of water were spraying everywhere over the *New York*, washing her superstructure, flooding her decks; muddy streams gushed from the scuppers in her armor belt, cleansing her of the dust and grime of coaling, but blackening the clear waters of Long Island Sound as they poured overboard.

Another bucket roared in overhead, dumped its load. Blake turned again to his task, encouraged his weary men.

"Come on, *Texas!* Only a few more now and we're off to the war. Dig in,

boys; instead of coal, you'll soon be heaving shells at the Kaiser! Hear that rumble? The *New York's* heaving in her anchor to short stay. They're only waiting for us."

Reddened eyes stared up at him, white teeth gleamed strangely out against coal black faces; the gobs of the Third Division plied their shovels with redoubled vigor and strove to drown their discomfort with vivid jokes about what they'd soon be doing to the Kaiser. Whistles shrieked, clamshell buckets thundered down into the emptying holds of the collier, cataracts of coal poured out on the deck of the deeply laden battleship.

A smile of satisfaction wreathed Blake's face. Never before had the ship coaled so fast; and never had his turret crew so far outclassed the other ship's divisions in manhandling it into the bunkers. Like that in everything, he thought; that division of his was always good. And now on the brink of their departure for the war zone, they were outdoing themselves.

He looked proudly at the white "E", hard won trophy of their marksmanship, shining even now through the coal dust against the war colored side of No. 3 turret—with that pair of fourteen-inch babies towering over their heads, instead of imprecations his boys would soon be hurling shrieking messengers of death against the armored sides of the Kaiser's battleships. And as soon as those buckets finished whipping the coal aboard—up anchor! The *Texas* and her sisters of the Sixth Battle Squadron would be on their way to the North Sea and to action.

"DUCK!"

At the top of his lungs Blake shrieked a warning, grew suddenly sick at the pit of his stomach as his scream failed to carry through the din. A wire on the boom forward of him parted; in agony Blake saw the heavy clamshell bucket swing sidewise, clip the mate on the *Ulysses* on the head, send him sprawling into an open coal bunker.

Blake leaped the rail to the collier's deck, peered down the hold. Forty feet below a limp mass was vaguely discernible through the dust, huddled on the steel plates at the bottom of the empty bunker.

Whistles shrilled, coaling ceased, a strange quiet enveloped the *Ulysses.* Seamen scrambled down steel ladders into the hold; Blake seized an empty coaling bag from his boatswain's mate, thrust a heaving line through its manila loops, lowered it down. A moment, then willing hands hoisted away, the canvas bag with its silent burden rose over the hatch coaming, was gently lifted over the bulwark to the deck of the *Texas,* hurried below to the battleship's sickbay. And then, as if oblivious of human suffering, the winches creaked again, the interrupted river of coal started once more to flow aboard the *Texas.*

Shaken by the sudden tragedy, Blake fingered his whistle nervously, followed with anxious eyes the course of the buckets swinging in over his men. The boom forward of him was out of commission; his gang would have to receive the coal for the Second Division now as well as their own. There was confusion for a moment, then the streams of coaling trucks were rerouted and the job proceeded, but gone were the rude jokes which had lightened the task.

A tap on his shoulder. Blake turned, found a marine at his side—the captain's orderly.

"The cap'n wants to see you, Mr. Blake; he's in with the admiral. He says to come right up, sir."

Lieutenant Blake stared in surprise, then turned the division over to his junior officer and, dodging in and out amid the heaps of coal and the laboring seamen, followed the orderly to the superstructure and up the ladder to the admiral's cabin.

The marine swung back a steel door in the starboard gallery. Blake hesitated a moment—his clothes were filthy with coal dust.

"Don't bother, Mr. Blake; come right in."

The admiral's gruff voice boomed through the door; Blake hurriedly stepped over the coaming, found himself facing not only the admiral and his own captain, but in addition an officer in a Naval Reserve uniform — Lieutenant Commander Bergstrom, skipper of the U. S. S. *Ulysses*, the collier alongside.

The admiral nodded, turned to Bergstrom.

"Lieutenant Blake will fill that billet fine, Captain." He looked toward Blake. "Mr. Blake, this is Captain—"

"But I tal you I don' vant nobody. I get along better yet vit' no mate than vit' strangers. Colliers ain't battleships," protested Bergstrom vehemently, disdaining to shake hands with the newcomer.

Blake looked curiously from the flushed skipper toward the admiral, then cast an inquiring glance at his own captain, standing glumly behind the admiral. What was up?

The admiral broke in bruskly.

"No more protests, Captain Bergstrom. This is war time; I can't let you go to sea short handed because of that accident. You'll find Mr. Blake entirely competent."

He glowered a moment at Bergstrom, turned again toward his flag captain. Blake's heart sank into his boots as he listened.

"Transfer Lieutenant Blake to the *Ulysses* immediately as her new mate. And he'll have to step lively; we'll probably be underway for Scapa Flow in thirty minutes now."

WITH reddened eyes—moistened from, well, coal dust perhaps—Blake leaned over the bridge rail of the *Ulysses*, watched the ships of the Sixth Battle Squadron fade slowly from sight in the dusk fringing the eastern horizon. Unconsciously his nails dug into his palms; with a leaden heart he gazed as the cage masts of the *Texas* disappeared over the rim of the sea.

Even yet he could hardly believe it had happened; his ship, his shipmates, were off to the war, and he, only a few hours before in command of a turret on one of those ships, straining with the others to get under way, was suddenly snatched away from everything that meant the Navy, metamorphosed into the mate of a dirty collier.

"Steady on sou'-sou'west, sir."

Vaguely Blake heard the helmsman repeat the course. He gritted his teeth. South-southwest, bound for Rio. And aboard what was next thing to a damned tramp, doomed to haul coal up and down the coast. Not even a chance to cross the Atlantic to coal the fleet in British waters. Coal, worse luck, was the one thing the Limeys could supply themselves on the other side. South-southwest! And there, heading due east toward the war zone were his ship, his shipmates, his guns. He looked aft over the triced up coaling booms, the steel trusses, the huge hatch covers being lowered in place over empty bunkers. This was no warship; the *Ulysses* looked more like a section of Brooklyn Bridge under way than any proper vessel for a sailor. And as a fighting ship! He looked scornfully at the two four-inch guns she carried on her poop. Probably not a man on board who could manage to hit the broad side of a barn even at close range.

He sighed as he thought of the glistening interior of his thickly armored turret on the *Texas* with its enormous guns, its bulging recoil cylinders, the hoists disgorging tremendous projectiles to be swallowed up in the yawning breeches.

And now? Those four-inch popguns! And never a chance while the war raged on across the sea, to use even them. And this the reward of merit! Because his record was good the admiral had chosen him. Important position! He recalled how the admiral had tried to soften the bitter pill. Good man needed. He wished he'd had a few courts on his record so they'd picked some one else and left him with his turret. And on top of everything Bergstrom had said he didn't want anybody. Why hadn't the Old Man

taken Bergstrom at his word, left him with his guns? With hundreds of other lieutenants in the squadron too, why had—oh, hell! What was the use?

The *Ulysses* was heading south off Montauk; the battleships were disappearing into the broad Atlantic. This was the end of the years he had spent sweating, fighting, drilling that turret crew so that every twenty seconds a pair of fourteen-inch projectiles should go screaming toward the enemy while the *Texas* reeled under the recoil of her guns, and behind her armored walls, his men coolly fed more shells into the smoking breeches. The end. He turned dully from the rail, glanced about the unfamiliar bridge.

There, behind the helmsman, he saw Bergstrom, sensed the look of hatred in the skipper's eyes as he took in his new first officer. Well, it might as well be mutual, thought Blake. Who was Bergstrom, anyway, to protest to the admiral against taking a regular Naval officer? Like all the collier officers, perhaps one step above a boatswain's mate. Some ex-sailor, tougher than the rest, who had learned enough navigation to get a license, then a berth in the old Naval Auxiliary Service, and now through the miracle of the war, here he was, a Naval officer, a lieutenant commander in the reserve. In the eyes of the ordinary citizen a representative of the traditions of Annapolis.

Blake coolly faced his skipper's glance. That a Naval officer! He wouldn't know a trajectory from a Mollier's diagram, and he probably navigated by the canned methods in Bowditch. Nevertheless, there he stood, in the Navy only a few months, with two and a half gold stripes on each sleeve, skipper of the ship, while Blake, still a lieutenant even though ten years out of Annapolis, was only his first officer. Everything on this damned ship was on a par with the crazy events of the last few hours.

Bergstrom dropped his eyes, turned his weatherbeaten face to pore over the chart. Blake paused a moment to see if he would speak, then climbed down the steep ladders to the main deck to supervise securing their gear for sea.

Working in the water and the coal dust on deck, begrimed sailors in dungarees were lashing the clamshells down abreast the closed hatches; aloft on every set of coaling towers the deck force struggled in the gathering darkness to rig in the booms, seize them firmly in their vertical housings against the steel masts.

Blake splashed his way down the narrow port passage outboard of the hatch coamings, stumbling in the dusk over unseen pad eyes riveted everywhere to take the myriad coaling blocks. He swore under his breath; there wasn't a square yard of clear deck on the damned hooker. And the sailors! He peered into their faces as he worked his way aft. The riffraff of the merchant marine; probably the best they could get, though, for a collier. All the difference in the world between them and the young Americans the Navy recruited for its warships.

BLAKE spread his feet wider apart, braced himself as the *Ulysses* rolled unsteadily to a quartering sea. He pressed the telescope of his sextant firmly against his right eye, squinted through the dim light of the early dawn at the faint line of the eastern horizon just starting to make itself visible in the fast fading night. Slowly he turned the vernier screw, bringing Sirius down till the bright star danced just above the horizon line, called to the quartermaster at his side holding the comparing watch—

"Stand by!"

Another twist of the screw and in his telescope the star touched the horizon.

"Mark!"

The quartermaster jotted down the time, looked inquiringly toward Blake as the latter peered through the microscope at his vernier to read the altitude.

"Belay that, Mr. Blake."

Astonished, Blake glanced up to see Bergstrom, sextant in hand, standing beside him on the bridge, waving the quartermaster away.

"It ain't necessary for you to bodder vit' navigation no more; on my ship I'm the navigator. Them Navy ideas of trusting junior officers to do it don' go vit' me."

Blake flushed, quit reading his sextant.

"You won't have to worry about trusting me, Captain. I was navigator a whole cruise on the *Michigan*."

"That ain't noddin' vit' me." A surly look filled Bergstrom's eyes. "I don' trust my ship to nobody." He beckoned to the quartermaster. "Larsen, mark the time now." He faced the east, lifted his sextant, hastily adjusted the mirrors to catch a sight before the stars faded in the brightening dawn.

Blake's jaws tightened; he gazed curiously at Bergstrom as the skipper's clumsy fingers struggled to adjust his sextant. What ailed the man, anyway? Blake could understand his antipathy toward having a Naval officer as his exec; many merchant officers felt that the Navy looked down patronizingly at them.

And on the other hand, most Naval officers felt that the merchant officers considered them as gold laced tea fighters, not seamen. And there were enough incompetents on either side to lend color to both theories. Blake knew that; he realized how his skipper might feel, but why carry it to extremes? And especially in navigation, where Blake when he was a midshipman had starred; the very sextant he held in his hand was a prize, won as the most competent navigator in his class. And now this marlinspike sailor was saying he couldn't be relied on to navigate a collier when he had spent two years navigating a battleship.

Bergstrom gave the quartermaster his altitude, searched the sky for another star at right angles to Sirius to give him a "fix" by crossing his two lines of position. He sighted one to the southeast, hastily shot it, then turned again to Blake.

"On my ship I'm the skipper an' the navigator. You stand your vatch, look out for the deck force, an' don' vorry over nodding else. You onderstand dot?"

Blake repressed his rising anger, nodded briefly, went below cursing inwardly. His cruise on the *Ulysses* was going to be a madhouse with that captain.

And no relief. With a sinking heart he looked over the other officers gathered at breakfast round the table in the messroom in the poop. McGuire, the chief engineer, a boisterous mechanic, nothing more. Higgins, the second officer, a blear eyed weakling. Lost his master's certificate years ago. Ship piled on the rocks while he was drunk in his cabin. Hadn't been able to get an officer's berth again till the war started and any kind of a sailor was in demand. Olson, the carpenter, a stupid squarehead. The third officer, the assistant engineers? Blake looked them over hopelessly. The dregs of the merchant service.

Evidently the transports, the fast liners, the big freighters, the swarm of hastily converted auxiliary cruisers, had gobbled up all the competent officers in the merchant marine; only the misfits were left to man the colliers. Blake squirmed in his chair at the head of the mess table, nibbled distastefully the lukewarm bacon and eggs the colored messboy slid across the dirty tablecloth before him. What a change from his old mess on the fleet!

"Well, praises be, we're rollin' down to Rio! No coal this trip!" McGuire's voice boomed in his ear. Blake put down his half emptied coffee cup, looked up.

"No coal, Chief? Why not?"

"Shure, an' it's not. Fer why should we be steamin' to Rio fer coal, wid all thim Pocahontas black diamonds piled up in Hampton Roads?"

Blake nodded. McGuire was right. In the turmoil of the last twenty-four hours, it hadn't occurred to him that for coal it would be ridiculous to go to Rio. The heart of the seaboard coal industry was Hampton Roads. How many times had he seen the colliers loading up at Newport News, at Sewall's Point? No coal? Perhaps the cruise of the *Ulysses* might develop something after all.

"What are we after?" he asked eagerly.

"Hit ayn't coal this time, matey, hit's

worse—a load o' ruddy manganese," broke in Higgins gloomily. "Hi knows the stuff; hit's so 'eavy, ye'll sink before ye gits yer 'olds filled.

"Shure, manganese ore fer the steel mills. Widout it how cud thim lads in Bethlehem 'n' Midvale turn out the big guns 'r the armor plates 'r the shells fer the byes in the trenches? Shure, wot wid a war goin' on 'n' all thim mills cryin' fer manganese fer tools 'n' ivrything ilse, it's worth its weight in gold now! Black diamonds we bin carryin'? If they wuz rale diamonds, they'd hardly be in it wid a cargo o' manganese fer rale value these days!"

"Manganese?" questioned Olson. "Ay tal' you, ay don't swallow such a yarn. What good ban manganese for, Chief, that gold ain't worth that much?"

"Shure, Chips, ye claims to be a carpenter, 'n' ye don't know that? It's fer to toughen steel; ye throws mebbe a few pounds in a big batch of o' molten steel fer an alloy, 'n' wot happens? The steel gits more'n twice as strong 'n' tougher'n hell. Widout it ye jist cudn't make thim armor plates, nor shells, nor big guns nor nuthin. Whin the manganese runs out, the war'll ind, I'm tellin' yez, fer the byes'll have to fight wid their fists thin."

"Right you are, matey," chimed in Higgins. "Hi was loaded down wit' it when Hi beached the *Landon Castle*, an' well Hi learned before the underwriters an' the Board o' Trade took my certificate wot manganese was worth even hin those days. An' now? The chief's right, hit's worth hits wight in gold!"

The discussion waxed warm, Higgins elaborating on the dangers of stowing such a cargo, with manganese ore five times as heavy as coal, and Olson arguing with McGuire as to the relative value of manganese to the various nations engaged in the war. Blake listened at first in amusement as tempers rose and cockney arguments were countered with the dialects of Cork and Copenhagen, but soon he lost interest. What difference, coal or manganese? Their final destination in either case was Hampton Roads, their mission only to be the prosaic bulk carrier on the quiet side of the Atlantic, while thousands of miles away, the fighting men of all nations struggled in the turmoil of the war zone to conquer their enemies by force of arms.

THE lightened *Ulysses*, her rusty sides high out of water in spite of the liquid ballast in her forepeak and all her double bottom tanks, rolled deeply to the long swells coming up on their starboard bow. An endless motion, complicated slightly by moderate pitching as the bow of the *Ulysses* plowed through the tropic seas, held the ship, amazing for its magnitude in such a mild sea. Blake watched, at first a little anxiously, then with professional interest only as the days wore on, the abnormal rolling of the topheavy collier. Twenty degrees to port, twenty degrees to starboard—that was nothing out of the ordinary for this ship with her forest of top hamper and her empty holds. On a battleship, weighted down with heavy waterline armor belts, ponderous machinery and magazines chock-a-block with shells, it would take a hurricane to develop that much motion. On the *Ulysses*, with a moderate sea and a light breeze, it was an everyday occurrence.

Blake pondered. Would filling the upper tanks with sea water for ballast make the *Ulysses* roll less or more? Certainly it would increase their draft and that should steady them; on the other hand the added ballast would be above their waterline and it might increase their already marked topheaviness. His forehead wrinkled over the problem, then he gave it up; it was too hot to think deeply. And putting sea water in the long disused tanks might ruin what good paint work there was left in them. Besides, tomorrow they should be due in Rio; once that manganese was aboard they'd be pumping out what ballast they had already in the double bottoms.

Rio tomorrow. Bergstrom's navigation was not so bad; each day his own sights

had checked the skipper's position within two or three miles—good, considering that because of the captain's opposition he had had to take his own sights unassisted by the quartermaster; had had to guess at the dead reckoning run between sights from their speed without access to the exact reading of the taffrail log.

But in spite of the skipper's evident anger he had kept up his old habit of getting a morning and an evening position, and had taken a somewhat unholy delight in Bergstrom's ill suppressed wrath at having his first officer even unofficially keep tab on the ship's runs.

Blake entered the chartroom, compared his wrist watch with the chronometer. Back in the wing of the bridge, keeping a little clear of Bergstrom, he lifted his sextant to his eye, flicked two smoked glass shades over the telescope sight, worked the screw a moment to bring the limb of the sun down on the sharp horizon line, then glanced hastily at his watch to get the time of his sight. Carefully he set his sextant on the broad teak rail, drew his notebook from his pocket and jotted down the time, then reached for the rail to read the altitude on his sextant.

A bump, Bergstrom stumbled against him, sent his precious sextant flying over the rail. Blake lunged futilely for it, missed, watched the delicate instrument bounce off the forward hatch, come to rest a twisted mass of junk on the deck twenty feet below.

Bergstrom looked down at the smashed sextant, shrugged his shoulders.

"Too bad, Mr. Blake. But this ain't no place for private property. You should leave your sextant below like I tol' you."

Blake glared at him. His prize sextant. What lubberly clumsiness! And Bergstrom was not even sorry. Blake clambered down the ladders, squirmed in between a winch and the anchor windlass, retrieved the wreckage of his sextant. He looked at it hopelessly. Ruined. With a muttered oath he tossed it overboard, strode aft along the heaving deck to his cabin in the poop.

RIO harbor. The dreary clank of the clamshell buckets echoed across the water, was lost in the wide sweep of the land locked bay. Dirty barges surrounded the *Ulysses*, ancient wooden hulks filled with manganese ore. Strange figures—coal black negroes, uncouth Indians—scrambled over the barges, shifting the empties, warping the loaded hulks to favorable positions under the collier's booms.

As the hours passed by the *Ulysses* sank lower and lower in the water; her Plimsoll mark began to go awash. And finally the last group of lighters was emptied, the last few tons of ore shoveled in heaps, sent aboard, dumped down the holds.

Blake made the rounds of the deck with the carpenter, peered down each of their huge cargo hatches into the bunkers where the crew of the *Ulysses*, armed with shovels, were leveling off the heaps of manganese.

The two forecastle bunkers, those forward of the bridge, Blake had left empty altogether, to fill as well as he could the holds amidships. But even so, he gazed with misgiving at the less than half filled cargo holds. He shook his head.

"What have you got for dunnage boards, Olson, to keep that cargo from shifting?"

"Ay don' have none, Mr. Blake. Always before the holds been full wit' coal so ay ain't never use none aboard here." The carpenter gaged the wide expanse of the open hold before him. "Such a yob tak' lots of lumber, ay tal' you."

"I can see that, all right, Chips; and lots of men too, to get dunnage boards over all that stuff and shored down shipshape and Bristol fashion so it won't shift in a seaway. Well, get your gang and measure up; I'll send the paymaster ashore to get a barge load of planks and timber for the job as soon as you turn in your list."

On the port side a frayed manila eye was dragged clear of a cleat and tossed overboard. A tug puffed vigorously, sending a cloud of black smoke rolling to leeward over the waist of the *Ulysses*.

Coughing violently as he stepped out of the haze of hot gases, Blake watched the last barge draw slowly away from their side. He looked down at the water—barely ten feet of their hull was now above the surface; they were fully loaded down, and that with the holds still half empty. Higgins was right, that manganese ore was heavy stuff. The sooner they got it properly stowed the sooner they would be off.

A rumble came from forward, a feather of steam curled round the forecastle, then the clatter and bang of the anchor cable shook the ship as the iron links hammered the hawsepipe. Blake turned in surprise and ran forward. Yes, there was the boatswain in the eyes of the ship, heaving in the anchor and Bergstrom leaning over the bridge rail, a short pipe clenched in his teeth and a megaphone in his hand, superintending the job.

The boatswain leaned over the forecastle side, turned, bawled out—

"Anchor's aweigh, sir!"

Bergstrom stooped, gripped the engine telegraphs with both hands, jerked them round to "one-third ahead". As Blake ran up the steep ladder to the bridge, the ship commenced to shake under his feet—the main engines were turning over.

Breathlessly he faced the skipper.

"The cargo isn't stowed yet, Captain. I need another day before we start."

Bergstrom blew a cloud of smoke into his face, started for the wheel.

"I haf orders to hurry, so ve vaste no time. Dot's a heavy cargo; it ain't required to stow it." He turned abruptly to the helmsman. "Hard left! Vatch your steering now."

His broad back smothered further discussion. Ignoring Blake altogether, Bergstrom shifted the telegraphs to "half ahead" as the huge bulk of the *Ulysses* gathered headway from the churning propellers and moved slowly from her anchorage.

Under way. And without even an attempt to stow the cargo for sea. Blake stared a moment at the captain's back, then spun on his heel, clambered down the ladder cursing under his breath. That, a sailor!

The heavily laden *Ulysses* steamed slowly out of the harbor, started to roll uneasily as she met the long Atlantic swells, while in the stifling heat of the dusty holds, sweating seamen strove to finish the trimming of the manganese, spreading it smoothly out over the bunkers.

One by one the hatches were battened down, the winches secured. The *Ulysses* turned her lumbering prow northward toward the equator; when the last hatch finally was lowered in place Rio and its coastline were fading into the dim haze far off on the port quarter.

SIX days later. The *Ulysses*, her brief stop at San Juan over, was once more under way, steaming out under the fortress guns on the last leg of her voyage, only the run from Porto Rico to Hampton Roads left.

Gathered in the waist of the ship, the narrow passage filled with their bags and hammocks, a group of ten bluejackets and three petty officers faced Lieutenant Blake.

"Here, sir."

"Here, sir."

One after another their crisp replies rattled across the deck as he called the roll from the list a chief gunner's mate in the party had given him. Blake smiled a little bitterly as he checked off each reply; these men were passengers for Norfolk, there for transshipment immediately to join the destroyer squadron at Queenstown for anti-submarine patrol. How he envied them as he scanned their bronzed faces—fighters all, happy at last to be on their way to the war.

War! Well, there had nearly been a miniature war right on the deck of the *Ulysses* when she dropped her mudhook in San Juan to leave the mail from Rio and pick up the mail for the States. Blake grinned as he remembered the look of surprise on Bergstrom's face when a motor sailer, carrying the American con-

sul and loaded down with bluejackets and their baggage, shot alongside the *Ulysses* while the mail was coming aboard, and the row that started when the consul informed them that the *Ulysses* was to take those seamen north.

Bergstrom had flatly refused; it was his ship and he would carry no passengers. And the consul had just as blandly insisted, standing on his cabled instructions that the men were to go north by the first Naval conveyance and the *Ulysses* plainly enough was the first Naval vessel that had stuck her nose into San Juan since the cable had come.

How Bergstrom had raged at that, cursed the consul, refused to allow the men aboard, ordered the ship under way as soon as the last mail bag came over the side.

That consul was a man, all right, thought Blake. He had listened silently to Bergstrom's epithets, then dropped down the side ladder into the motor sailer.

"Will you take these men aboard?" he had shouted as Bergstrom mounted the bridge.

"No, damn you! Keep dose men to hell off the *Ulysses!* She ain't a Naval transport, she's a collier!" And with that the skipper had ordered the boatswain to heave round on the anchor windlass.

Blake laughed aloud as he thought of it. The consul had pointed silently to the guns in the fortress at the harbor mouth, shouted back:

"Very well, Captain, clearance is refused! Better not try to sail. Within an hour I'll have a cable here from Washington designating a new skipper for the *Ulysses!*"

That had settled Bergstrom. Blake looked at the men in front of him, wondered where to put them. The regular crew had bunks abaft the engine room hatch, but there were no spares; these men would have to swing their hammocks from the deck beams in the forecastle. They'd manage it somehow; sailors always did.

He checked off the last name on the list, handed it to the ship's writer for entry in the log, turned again to the alert chief gunner's mate facing him.

"Johnson, you take charge of this draft. Stow their bags and hammocks for'ard; the carpenter'll lend a hand in putting up some temporary hooks for swings."

"Aye, aye, sir."

A snappy salute; Johnson faced about, marched his men forward. Blake's pulse quickened as he watched; man-o'-war's-men, those lads. He'd almost give his stripes to be in Johnson's boots on his way over there, and quit forever of this blasted collier and her damned skipper.

They passed the fort, stood out of the harbor, headed north-northwest for the Chesapeake Capes.

Blake glanced at the vanishing fort. Four more days and his first trip on the *Ulysses* would be over, they'd be discharging at Baltimore. That is, if the weather held good. They'd certainly been lucky in the weather on the run up from the Line. If it would only hold a few days more, especially with such a poorly stowed cargo. And once in Baltimore, Washington was hardly an hour away. And if he had a friend left in the Navy Department, his first trip on the *Ulysses* was going to be his last.

A collier was no place for a line officer in wartime; he'd make the detail officer in navigation see that even if he had to drag in his Congressman to put it over. The fleet again for him—if not that, destroyers, submarines, even the transports; anything on the other side would do rather than go back on the *Ulysses*. And one more thing he could count on—there'd be no objection to his transfer from the skipper. The sooner Bergstrom saw the last of him the happier he'd be.

"And that goes for me too," said Blake, half aloud, looking up to the bridge where Bergstrom crouched over the pelorus, taking a last bearing for his departure from the lighthouse on the point.

Eight bells. His watch. Blake mounted the bridge ladder, relieved

Higgins, perfunctorily repeated the course and speed, took up his position in the starboard wing of the bridge as far away from Bergstrom as he could get, scanned the horizon ahead. Nothing in sight.

The *Ulysses* plowed steadily northward. The engines, early in the watch, had settled down to a monotonous throb; only the uneven creaking of the booms as the ship rolled gently to the long swells, broke in on the rhythmic quivering of the overburdened hull.

Blake, looking aft along the long line of coaling towers and past the twin stacks at the break of the poop, scanned the horizon astern through his glasses. Porto Rico had vanished; the ship was well out in the open sea, homeward bound.

Another half hour and this watch would be over. A few more watches and the cruise would be over. After that, no more colliers. A few more watches. Could he keep his fists out of Bergstrom's face till they tied up in Baltimore? His record was clear; with luck and enough restraint he'd keep it that way till they came alongside the pier.

"Mr. Blake!"

Blake dropped his binoculars, looked inboard. At the head of the ladder from his cabin stood the captain, holding a letter. Blake walked over, saluted, caught a glimpse of the Navy Department seal across the letterhead.

"Mr. Blake, change course to east-nor'east."

In surprise Blake looked at the skipper.

"East-northeast, Captain?"

"East-nor'east, Mr. Blake!"

Without a word Blake stepped to the wheel.

"Hard a'port!"

The helmsman spun his wheel to starboard, the bow fell away, a broad streak of white showed under the counter as the stern kicked over under the push of the hard over rudder, and the ship heeled sharply in her turn. The lubber's mark started to move over the compass dial—north, north-northeast, northeast, the compass points spun past the black line marking the ship's head.

"Meet her."

"Meet 'er, sir!" The helmsman reversed his grip, the spokes flew round. The rudder swung back, went five degrees to port to check the swing, then as the bow came slowly on the course, was gently eased back to midships.

Blake watched a moment, marking the position of the jackstaff against the horizon to make sure they had steadied on the new course, turned to Bergstrom.

"Steady on east-northeast, sir."

Bergstrom beckoned to him, indicated the folded paper in his hand.

"Orders from the Department, Mr. Blake. Consul delivered 'em at San Juan, sealed, marked, 'Not to be opened till fifty miles at sea.' I just opened it. Ve discharge at Newcastle, not Baltimore."

Blake's heart throbbed violently. Newcastle! They were going across after all. Through the war zone. Newcastle! Scapa Flow, the Grand Fleet, the *Texas* would be but a few miles away and he might get transferred back. But there'd be one trip through the war zone anyway, a chance to fight if U-boats spotted them. Like a flash his worries lifted, he smiled at Bergstrom.

"Of all the luck to have that draft come aboard just in time! I'll organize some decent gun crews right away." He looked with new interest at the four-inch guns, standing out in black on their quarter. "And we can practise firing at some kegs heaved overboard tomorrow!" He caught himself suddenly, looked at Bergstrom. "Any reasons given?"

"No, just discharge at Newcastle. Maybe our cargo is more needed there."

"I suppose so," replied Blake. "Say, did you notice three o' those men were wearing gun pointer's ratings, and two of 'em had white E's on their sleeves? Can you beat that for luck?"

"Vot's the difference? A sub we can't see; a cruiser's too big. Let's hope ve don' meet noddings."

"Don't worry, Captain. You'll be surprised what a couple of four-inch rifles can do in good hands. Just leave 'em to me!"

Higgins mounted the ladder to take the watch, but after glancing around he strode to the wheel, looked over the helmsman's shoulder at the binnacle.

"Hi thought it was queer, the sun bein' on the wrong quarter. We're 'eadin' east! Wot's up, matey?"

Blake explained. Higgins' face fell.

"Lord 'elp us, facin' them U-boats in this tub! Why didn't I ship in the king's navy an' sink under the Union Jack?"

Bergstrom looked a little queerly from Higgins to Blake.

"Vell, nodding pleases 'em all." He turned on his heel, vanished down the ladder.

Blake checked the heading with his relief, turned over the deck, started aft. But the news had reached the wardroom before him, and round the table he found an excited group of officers arguing their chances of stealing safely through the submarine infested waters around the British Isles.

Ignoring the discussion, Blake retreated into his room, tossed his cap and binoculars on the bunk, punched the button on the bulkhead alongside his desk.

A black head, a pair of shoulders in a dirty mess jacket pushed through the green baize curtain in the door.

"Yas, sah, Mistah Blake."

"George, tell that chief gunner's mate who came aboard at San Juan I want him right away. You'll find him in the focsle."

"Yes, sah, Mistah Blake." The messboy disappeared.

BLAKE peered under his dripping sou'wester at the barometer. Down another tenth of an inch last hour. They were in for it, all right. He pulled his hat more tightly down, staggered to the charthouse door, opened it, stepped through. A fierce blast struck the door, tore it from his grip, heaved it back against his leg, gouged a chunk out of his shin. With a smothered oath, he put his shoulder against the door, by main force heaved it back, worked his way outboard to the wing of the bridge, crouched low behind the windscreen for protection.

The sea was rising, whipped by a wind of hurricane force. Already the *Ulysses* was pitching heavily. All around a wild sea met Blake's gaze. The ocean, a mass of dull gray waves under a black sky, was covered with sheets of flying spray blown from the crests, driving like hail into his face. In endless succession the seas rolled up under the starboard counter, smacked the high poop, broke over the low bulwark amidships in a mass of green water, washed forward along the side while the ship staggered beneath the blows and, heeling under the mass of water on her deck, poured it in cataracts through the freeing ports back into the trough of the sea.

Blake watched the top hamper uneasily. With the sea under their counter, they were making the best weather possible of it; even so the labored rolling of the ship worried him. If the sea increased and the wind hauled abeam—no dunnage boards, no shores over their cargo. What would it do if the collier started rolling in earnest?

The *Ulysses* was not much as a heavy weather vessel. Her low freeboard amidships permitted the seas free sweep across the bulwark each time she rolled to windward; the starboard passage between the coaling trunks and the rail became a foaming lake as each crest rolled past the break of the poop, washed over the steel side, swirled up the deck in crazy maelstroms, burying the cleats, the deck scuttles, breaking with a roar against the bridge deckhouse under his feet; then, as the wave swept by, pouring overboard through the scuppers and the overburdened freeing ports, while the ship, weighed down by the added tons of water in her waist, strove to right herself and then, rolling to leeward, sent the remaining water pouring in angry torrents over the coaling hatches and into the port scuppers.

Sluggish; no reserve buoyancy to make her rise, to let her ride the waves sweeping up on her quarter. And all that top

hamper swaying high above the decks, leaning far outboard as she rolled, first to starboard then to port, holding her down while the heavy seas pounded across the buried rails.

The wind whistled through the coaling towers, drowned out the creaking of the booms as they worked unsteadily in their housing straps against the masts. Smoke, cut sharply off the tops of the twin stacks, drove forward in a black cloud diagonally through the rigging, swirled to leeward just abaft the bridge house. Blake watched it, scudding low over the waves on the port bow, quickly lost to sight against the low background of black clouds that covered the sky, ringed in the horizon.

The stern rose to a crest, rolled to port. A sudden rumble shook the *Ulysses*. The starboard screw, half out of water, was racing free. The wave rolled forward, the stern dropped, the buried propeller slowed suddenly, the rumbling ceased as the bow pitched high out of water and the next wave hurled itself against the poop. Blake shook his head. It must be a madhouse below, with the black gang sliding all over the floor plates trying to heave coal through furnace doors which never stayed put long enough for a fireman to get his shovel decently poised in front of it.

And in the engine room McGuire and his machinists were wildly closing throttles each time a propeller came free to prevent a racing engine from tearing itself off its bedplates, and just as madly opening them again to keep headway on the ship when the whirling screw buried itself once more in solid water.

Quiver, pitch, roll, rumble. The *Ulysses* staggered onward through the storm. Blake turned his back to the wind, wiped the spray from his face, shook his head dubiously. The collier *Ulysses*—fine as a coaling machine, damn poor as a ship. One comfort anyway. They were on the edge of the war zone, but as long as this gale lasted there was no need to fear attack from submarine—or a surface ship for that matter. All would be busy, fighting their common enemy, the sea.

CLINGING tightly to the edge of the chartboard, Blake peered over the captain's shoulder at the chart. For three days they had fought their way northeast through the increasing storm; now they were a hundred miles west of Ireland and heading to pass north of it—if the skipper's navigation was accurate, which Blake had had no means of checking since their departure from San Juan.

Outside in the darkness the gale howled by. The center of the storm had finally caught up with them. For three days to a steadily falling barometer the wind had increased, the seas had mounted higher, pounded the laboring *Ulysses* harder and harder as the wind gradually hauled forward on their starboard quarter. An hour ago had come a sudden lull; the wind weakened, hauled rapidly ahead, started to blow again with redoubled force from the northwest. The center of the storm had at last passed over them; the barometer had taken a final plunge.

With wind and sea on the port bow the *Ulysses*, no longer running before the gale, groaned and shook from stem to stern as she pounded into the waves, her rolling increased.

And with the wind hauling more and more to port, the seas were starting to take them more directly abeam. On their present course, in less than an hour they might expect to be running in the trough of the sea.

Blake gaged roughly with his eye the distance to go before they changed course north of the Orkneys—another day's run at least. Dangerous.

He lifted his voice to make himself audible above the storm.

"Captain!" he shouted.

Bergstrom lifted his head, turned an unshaven face across which shot an ugly look of surprise as he first became aware of the presence of his mate scanning the chart.

"Vot is it?"

"The wind's hauling abeam, sir," yelled Blake in his ear. "We'd better change course to the sou'east, run for the

Channel and discharge at Liverpool."

Bergstrom shook his head, shouted back—

"No, ve are bound for Newcastle!"

"I know it," said Blake angrily, "but the cargo's not stowed right. In this storm, if we catch the seas abeam, she'll be a bad actor!"

"Don' vorry, Mr. Blake," sneered the captain. "Ain't you a sailor?"

Involuntarily Blake clenched his fists, poised himself on the unsteady deck, then slowly relaxed his hands. Wartime. Nothing in that. He caught a queer flicker in Bergstrom's eyes. The skipper had not missed that motion, had half ducked to avoid the threatened blow, was now reaching into his pocket. He pulled out a bunch of keys, unlocked a drawer under the chart table, ostentatiously drew out a pistol, fingered the butt a moment, casually slipped it into his coat pocket.

"The *Ulysses* goes to Newcastle!" he repeated roughly. "I carry out my orders."

Blake stared fixedly at the bulge in the skipper's coat. Armed. The yellow dog! Slowly he raised his eyes; as calmly as possible he faced Bergstrom again.

"As good a sailor as you, Captain." For a moment he gazed steadily into Bergstrom's blue eyes. "Maybe a better one. That's why I'm afraid. Our cargo isn't stowed right. I objected to it in the beginning. If it shifts, the *Ulysses* 'll capsize. Change course to bring this sea astern!"

Bergstrom slipped his right hand into his pocket, stepped back into the corner of the chartroom, waved sharply with his huge left fist toward the door.

"Liverpool? Never! Ve go to Newcastle, you hear? Und on time, too! Now get th' hell oud!" His lips drew back in a snarl, a cold light gleamed in his eyes as he faced his mate.

"Crazy," muttered Blake, then turned on his heel, stepped out into the night.

Instantly he found himself fighting to hold his footing as the wind sweeping over the open bridge caught him full in the chest. He staggered outboard, crouched in the port wing, clung to the pelorus stand as he tried to peer out at the sea. Darkness everywhere. Invisible waves battered the forecastle, broke in dim patches of white foam as the water swept over the sides.

Below he could barely make out the coaling hatches, vague islands in the swirling seas washing them amidships. Back aft, two dull red glows stood out high against the dark sky, marking the tops of their smokestacks, weaving back and forth against the dense blackness of the night as the ship tossed in the seaway.

Blake clutched the pelorus, cursed inwardly. Wartime, yes. Important to discharge at their designated port, of course. And on time, too. Their cargo was urgently needed, or they would never have been so suddenly and secretly routed across the sea instead of to Baltimore. But war or no war, no sailor was justified in holding his course in this gale. Especially in the *Ulysses*. He looked inboard, watched in the dim light reflected from the binnacle inside the wheelhouse door, the helmsman clinging to his spokes, struggling to hold the ship's head into the wind, the constant spinning of the wheel to head her up again as each sea smote the bow and flung the ship's head to leeward.

The rolling was worse. Twenty degrees each side, anyway. What was the matter with the Old Man? Get that sea astern, head south away from it. And if they couldn't discharge at Liverpool, when the storm blew over, they could steam through the Irish Sea around Scotland, only a few days late at most.

What right did Bergstrom have to hazard the ship, their priceless cargo, in his mad whim to hold his course? Arrive on time? The ship lifted to a huge wave, lurched heavily into the trough with a bump that capsized the pelorus in the gimbals. Blake straightened it up, waited anxiously as the ship slowly righted herself. Arrive on time? Lucky to arrive at all.

Another bad roll, another dull thud as

the bow smacked the sea. Then a sharp crash aft. Blake let go the pelorus, looked astern.

The glow at the top of the port funnel was dancing athwartship like a firefly, rocking wildly about a red glare showing fitfully at its base, low down close to the deck. The guys must have carried away on the port stack; the stack itself was about to go overboard!

Blake leaped across the bridge for the ladder, heard the engine telegraphs clanging wildly in the wheelhouse as he shot down. The throbbing of the hull suddenly quieted as he hit the deck. The engines had stopped.

Buried in water to his waist, Blake fought his way aft along the lee passage, one moment swept against the bulwark, the next sliding inboard against the coaling trunks. The rolling grew worse. As the ship lost headway she swung slowly into the trough of the sea, caught the waves fair on the port beam. With each heave now the side buried itself completely in solid water. The stumbling mate clung desperately to eyebolts, to winch leads, to anything in reach to keep from washing overboard as the seas swept across; then on the up roll, half swam, half ran as far as possible toward the poop. They must save their stacks! If the seas ever washed down the uptakes and put out the fires the *Ulysses*, a helpless hulk without steerageway, could never ride out that storm.

Half strangled with salt water, bruised and battered in his journey, the frantic officer reached the break of the poop, dragged himself up the starboard ladder, paused an instant to survey the damage. A terrifying pounding met his ears. The port after coaling boom, a heavy latticed steel structure, had broken free of its housing strap at the upper end, was swinging wildly athwartships about its gooseneck in the base of the after coaling tower. With each roll of the ship it swept across the poop in a wide arc like a scythe, cutting through everything in its path. Already it had carried away the guys of the port stack, was prevented from flying to starboard only because the swaying funnel had not yet toppled over.

With a noise like the roar of a huge drum the boom swung inboard again, hit the funnel, cut a wide gash through the steel plates. Smoke and flame poured out along the ruptured base, swirled aft over the counter. The stack leaned drunkenly over, lay an instant against the starboard funnel; then, as the vessel rolled to windward, pivoted on its few remaining guys and fell loosely back, following the boom which, lying outboard now, seemed poised, waiting only for the next roll, to swing in and wreck the funnel completely.

Blake gazed aloft in the darkness. What was holding the head of that boom up? A standing stay, probably the guy which took the load when the boom was rigged outboard for coaling. He remembered it vaguely. A one-inch wire, shackled to the head of the boom, shackled inboard to a pad at the top of the tower.

A MOB of white faced firemen streamed out the fiddley hatch. In the dim glare from the broken stack Blake saw them pouring upward, half naked men fresh from the stokehold, bare chests, bare arms glistening weirdly in the glare reflected from their perspiring bodies. Gasping and choking from the smoke filling the firerooms below, they struggled out on the poop, rushed blindly to windward seeking fresh air. Then, seeing the hurtling boom and the swaying stack dangling over their heads, they turned and, in spite of the smoke covering the poop, ran for the stern.

"C'mon back here, ye yellow bellies! Stand by yer fires!"

McGuire. Uncertainly Blake made out the form of the chief engineer in the smoke pouring up the fiddley hatch, clutching a wrench in one hand high over his head, ready to hurl it after his fleeing firemen.

In swung the boom, stopped with a

deafening crash against the stack. Involuntarily McGuire ducked, dropped the wrench.

"Chief!" Blake leaped to his side. "Gimme that wrench!" Before the startled engineer could recover it, Blake seized the wrench. "Lend a hand, Mac. We'll clear it!"

Beckoning to McGuire to follow, Blake leaped to the forward poop rail, clambered over it. Still clutching the wrench, he started to climb the narrow iron ladder running up the starboard side of the after coaling tower.

The ship rolled violently under him, the ladder jerked uncertainly with every yaw, the wind whistled sharply by as he scrambled upward in the darkness. Not a foot away as he crawled upward he could feel the starboard boom, the mate to the one which threatened to wreck the ship, straining madly against its housing, endeavoring to tear itself free each time the *Ulysses* brought up with a mad jerk at the end of its roll. And with every jolt Blake instinctively stopped climbing, clung desperately to the slippery steel rungs to avoid being snapped off and hurled into the black ocean.

He reached the top, fifty feet above the tossing deck, stretched out full length on the horizontal girder, wormed his way on his stomach across to the windward side. He bumped an obstruction, paused, clung tightly and raised his head cautiously to examine it. The topmast. A wooden stick, stepped amidships on the after coaling tower to carry the radio antennæ. Carefully he gripped its square base and dragged his body, his legs hanging free in space, around to the other side. He stretched out again to resume his crawl. As he turned he saw McGuire's huge form close behind, heard his labored breathing as he dragged himself toward the mast.

Outboard once more. The windward side now. Below him Blake saw the smoke pouring from the starboard funnel, could look down the port stack as it swayed crazily below him. The guy wire. Where was it secured? Slowly he felt round the steel top of the coaling tower. He could hear the shackle groaning as the boom swung round, rushing in an arc about that shackle. Down below him somewhere. A squeeze on his foot. McGuire was right behind him now, could go no farther.

Cautiously Blake reached over, felt the latticed side of the tower. Not too far. If he reached too low and that guy swung round and nipped his arm against the mast . . . His fingers ran against a pad eye; he could feel it quiver as the boom shot round. *Bang!* The boom hit the stack again, stopped an instant. Blake shot his hand lower, his fingers swept swiftly over the eye. As he thought. A big shackle bolt through it, holding everything. With that bolt out, he could drop the boom and end its mad career before it carried away both stacks. He jerked his fingers back to safety as the quivering started again.

How to get at that bolt? He had imagined the pad would be on top of the tower where he could stretch out on the girder while he worked. But it must be at least two feet down on the outboard side. A monkey couldn't hold on to work leaning down that far. He felt desperately round the tower for a ladder. None on that side. Only on the starboard side.

Another smash. He peered down. The port funnel was battered into a shapeless mass, wreathed in smoke. A few more blows and it would be gone. The ship took a terryfying roll to port. It seemed to Blake, as he swung dizzily downward, that he could touch the crests of the breaking waves below him. A jerk. The ship stopped, hung a moment while Blake looked into the foaming sea below, then the *Ulysses* rolled slowly back. But not all the way. Steam and steerage must come soon, or she'd keep right on rolling on the next bad one, with no stopping and no coming back.

Blake twisted round, shouted:

"Mac! Hold my legs!"

He dragged himself outboard till his body hung over the tower, and the steel cap plate jammed itself into his stomach.

He felt Mac's arms encircle his thighs, Mac's hands gripping the lattice of the girder, Mac's heavy body pressing down on his legs. Letting go his own grip of the tower, he dangled his arms over the edge, hung head first down the side of the tower, slid his monkey wrench over the nut. Too loose. He jerked the wrench clear, adjusted the jaws, tried again, got a turn on the nut before the shackle whirled round and slipped from his grip. The wire stay tightened suddenly, sang as the boom whistled round, hit the stack, paused a moment.

Feverishly he slipped the wrench in place again, heaved round on the wrench during the brief slack that followed at the end of that roll. A pause, a dizzy sweep to windward. Swinging through space, high above the deck as the ship careened, Blake grew suddenly sick inside as his bowels seemed to heave up his throat. The wind roared by his ears, driving spray drenched his shoulders, the swinging boom danced crazily before his eyes.

The end of another roll. He gripped the loosened nut with his fingers, twisted. Lucky. The threads were free. Frantically he spun the nut, ran off the last thread, dropped the useless nut into the welter of foam below.

The ship lifted, started to heel to leeward. He saw the port rail rise clear of the water, the boom start to pivot, to swing aft again, gathering speed as it went.

Blake clenched his teeth, twisted his body to follow its motion. Now to knock out that shackle bolt. He lifted his wrench, poised his arm for the blow. The boom must drop inboard, well clear of the rail, where they could lash it down.

Crash! It struck the stack again, stopped. Now! Blake swung the wrench viciously, sent the bolt flying out of the eye. With a jerk the shackle shot clear of the pad eye; in a roar of tearing steel the boom dropped, cut through a maze of backstays, crashed to the poop. Behind him Blake heard the sound of splintering wood, then a choked grunt. The topmast had carried away, the broken spar hurtled past him. The grip on his legs suddenly relaxed, he felt himself falling from the top of the coaling tower head first into blackness. His fingers clawed wildly for the lattice of the steel tower alongside, missed. His staring eyes saw the foam covered deck shooting suddenly up at him.

PAINFULLY Blake lifted his bandaged side clear of the bunk, looked up at the petty officer peering through the curtained door. Johnson, the chief gunner's mate they had picked up at San Juan.

"How's McGuire now, Chief?" he asked.

Johnson stepped into the stateroom, fingered his cap nervously. Blake noticed for the first time he was gray haired around the temples; his thin face was startlingly pallid under a weather beaten skin.

"He's gone, Lieutenant," muttered Johnson slowly. "Overboard, I guess. We ain't found no sign o' him. An' by the time they got steam up again below an' the skipper got steerageway on 'er, it wasn't no use searchin'."

"Didn't the captain even try to lower a lifeboat?" asked Blake bitterly.

"No use, even if he'd tried. All the boats is smashed. The seas made matchsticks out of 'em while we was caught in the trough. She's rolled the sticks outa her, an' the radio antennae's carried away, an' with all that wreckage aft, the cap'n didn't know fer awhile was he comin' 'r goin'. Lucky fer you that port passage was awash when you hit; musta been six feet o' water on the deck when you came down an' it broke yer fall; me an' the bosun's mate found you jammed in between the bulwark an' that busted topmast an' we all damn near drowned afore we dragged you clear an' up on the poop." He looked at Blake's bandaged shoulder, asked sym-

pathetically, "How ye feelin' now, sir?"

Blake tried to raise himself. A twinge of pain shot through his shoulder, and he fell back against the bulkhead outboard of his bunk. Queer how he couldn't get clear of that port bulkhead; why, when the ship rolled, didn't he occasionally find himself tossed over to the other side? Well, his right arm was still good anyway. He reached out, grabbed the edge of his bunk, awkwardly dragged himself to a half sitting position.

"Collar bone broken, I guess, Johnson. Must have landed on my left shoulder. Say, what's the matter with this hooker, anyway? I can't get clear of the port side of this bunk."

The gunner's mate looked at him uneasily, answered hesitantly:

"She's got a permanent list to port now, sir, ten or fifteen degrees anyhow. The cargo shifted to port all of a sudden while we was takin' them seas broadside to. An' when that manganese slid into the port bilges she took such a deep lurch an' lay over so long decidin' which way was she gonna roll, with the deck damn near vertical an' me hangin' on to a cleat to keep from droppin' overboard, that I thought she wasn't never comin' back. Believe me, I was sure sick while she was hesitatin'. Lucky fer us the engines started turnin' over ag'in just then so's they could head her up into the weather. Another roll like that an' she woulda kept right on goin'." He braced himself on the sloping deck.

"I tell ye, Mr. Blake, the boys up for'd 'r' sure thankful ye got that boom cleared 'fore it wrecked that other stack. As it is, things ain't so shipshape. We're runnin' with our port rail awash all the time an' a heel that'd give even a windjammer skipper who was used to runnin' close hauled, a fit to contemplate; but now the wind's hauled aft an' is dyin' away. As fur as I kin make out, we're back on our original course an' Mr. Higgins says we'll round the Orkneys tonight. Somthin' I kin do fer you, Mr. Blake?"

Blake shook his head.

"No, Johnson, but if the weather's clearing, get your crews together now and set the watches at the guns. The mess-boy'll look after me. I guess I won't get out on deck for a couple of days yet. Keep a bright lookout for periscopes. We're in the war zone."

"Aye, aye, sir. Leave that to us. But it ain't U-boats that's worryin' me no more, it's the *Ulysses* herself. It's gonna be nip 'n' tuck 'tween us an' Davy Jones to see who gets this hooker now." Johnson put on his cap, saluted, withdrew.

So what Blake feared had happened. He lay back in his bunk, watched the deck beams overhead sway back and forth as the ship rolled, tried to gage the heel. Johnson had not overstated it; they were listed to port fifteen degrees at least. No wonder he had found it difficult to get away from the bulkhead on the low side of his bunk. Something to be thankful for at that. If the list had been to starboard instead, he'd be continually rolling out on the deck. Bad angle, all right. Tough on the firemen, having to work the fires with a heel like that. Lucky if they kept enough water in the high side to avoid burning out the tubes. A mess, all right, nothing shipshape alow or aloft. One consolation anyway. He twisted his neck, gazed at the crude bandages the sickbay steward had wound round his left shoulder. No surgeon on the ship.

When they got to Newcastle he'd certainly be transferred to a shore hospital to have his shoulder set. And long before he was returned to active duty, the *Ulysses* would be on her way, he didn't give a damn where. And he'd still be in England. Under those circumstances, wangling a detail back to the *Texas* should be as easy as falling off a log—or off a coaling tower. He needn't worry about Bergstrom any further; if he wanted, there'd be no more watches, no more arguments with that squarehead; he'd stay in his bunk till they made Newcastle. After that, Bergstrom would have a first rate excuse for getting rid

of him. And he could trust Bergstrom not to pass it up.

Everything was going to turn out right, after all. He sank back wearily against the bulkhead, closed his eyes with a smile.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE, half clothed as he lay on his bunk, a bathrobe draped awkwardly round his shoulders covering the arm bandaged in tightly against his left side, craned his neck to get a glimpse of the horizon through his porthole. A circle of gray waves met his eye. With that heel, the only view he could get was of the water close aboard. He twisted his body, tried to look upward enough to get an oblique line of sight to counteract the list. No use, he found he couldn't make it. He sank back to a reclining position on his pillow.

He was on the wrong side of the ship anyway, mused Blake. Land would be sighted on the starboard hand as they ran south down the east coast of England for Newcastle.

Three days had passed since the storm off the coast of Ireland; since they had rounded the Orkneys and headed into the North Sea, the weather had cleared and nothing worse than a fresh breeze and a choppy sea had marked their passage southward. The rolling was only moderate now; it was certain that they would arrive safely at their destination with no more storms to worry about. And that was cause for thankfulness.

Blake, on his few brief excursions to the wardroom, had peered out the door on to the port gallery of the poop and, looking forward at the ship, had marveled that she had ever ridden safely through the storm. Even then, in a moderate seaway, his heart rose into his mouth to see the sharp angle at which the *Ulysses* lay to port, her rail awash always, the water half covering the narrow passage between the coaling trunks and the side, the brass deck scuttles now visible, now buried as the ship rolled uneasily along and the waves swashed inboard.

Bergstrom was a sailor, all right, Blake had to admit; any man who could bring a ship in that condition out of a storm still afloat and right side up was a good seaman, whatever other faults he had. And his devotion to duty! Driving ahead, through fair weather or foul to make his port and make it on time! You had to admire him for that. Not many skippers would take such risks to carry out their orders.

Blake pressed the buzzer alongside his berth, glanced idly at the round patch of water showing through his port. The messboy poked aside the curtains. Blake looked up at him.

"Any land yet, George?"

"No, sah. Ain't nothin' in sight nowhere's yit, Mistah Blake."

"All right. Thanks, George."

Blake turned wearily again to contemplate the monotonous circle of heaving waves framed by his tightly dogged porthole. According to Higgins, their dead reckoning down the coast should have brought them a landfall off the mouth of the Tyne at latest in the morning watch. And it was now midafternoon with nothing sighted. Evidently the captain's navigation wasn't up to his seamanship.

Some excuse, perhaps, for overcast skies had probably not given a sight of anything since the storm started. Still there must have been an opportunity for a new departure in the Orkneys; from there south to Newcastle, dead reckoning, even without sights, Bergstrom should have done better than that.

He speculated idly on the reasons. Their compass might be off; it had, of course, been compensated for the ship's magnetism with the *Ulysses* on an even keel; now with the relative position of the ship changed, an unknown deviation from the magnetic meridian may have resulted to throw them off their course. And then it was probable that the skipper himself was not up to scratch; since entering the North Sea he had not left the bridge, so Higgins had reported, keeping the watch himself practically

all the time, and snatching only a few minutes sleep on the chart table now and then.

"The Old Man's worried," Higgins had said. "'E's got all 'ands up in them coaling towers as lookouts, but is their orders to look fer periscopes? No. They're all to keep an eye out on the 'orizon fer masts 'r smoke. Batty, Hi calls 'im. 'Ere, right off our coast, lookin' fer German cruisers. The 'Uns 've got more sense 'n to send surface raiders right under the noses o' the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow. 'U-boats, Cap'n, them's the only danger,' I says to 'im, but 'e won't listen. 'Raiders, Mr. 'Iggins,' says 'e. 'Now we've come this far, we mustn't meet no raiders. We keep clear of every smoke to make sure we meet no raiders. So we must see their smoke first.' An' blimey hif 'e ain't got every one o' them si'lors we picked up in the Caribbees 'anging in the superstructure like a bunch o' monkeys, scoutin' the 'orizon. An' not a gun manned!"

That had puzzled Blake. Ridiculous to expect to encounter German raiders off Newcastle. If any were out, they'd be far to the eastward, on a line from Helgoland to Bergen, trying to sneak unnoticed round the Shetlands or the Faroe Islands and get by the British Tenth Cruiser Squadron into the broad Atlantic. It would be suicide for them, so far from Helgoland, to be prowling close in on the British coast with British cruisers based at Rosyth or at Scapa ready to pounce on them at the first alarm, and with the Harwich Squadron in their rear, favorably placed to cut off a retreat to Helgoland should they be sighted. No, no chance of meeting cruisers.

But the guns not manned. That had startled him. Here in the war zone, where the most danger was from U-boats, in such a precarious condition that a torpedo hit anywhere would rob them of their slight remaining stability, where their only chance with a submarine was to get their shots in first if sighted, the gun crews all in the tops, the guns not manned!

Higgins had forcibly restrained him as he slid from his bunk to run to the bridge and protest.

"Easy, Leftenant, easy now. Wot's the use o' another row wit' the skipper? When Hi come off watch, in one hour's run accordin' to our position on the chart, we'll pick up Souter Point Light at the Tynemouth. This voyage's over; we won't run into nothin' more. Take it easy; you done enough protestin' this cruise already—nagivatin', stowin' the cargo, changin' course in the storm—you was right in objectin', but wot 'd'it git ye wit' the skipper? Stay in yer bunk, take care o' yourself now. 'N other hour's run 'n' we'll be in."

He pushed Blake back on his pillow, tenderly adjusted the bathrobe round the bandaged shoulder, exacted Blake's promise to lie still, then went aft to get his breakfast.

That was hours ago now, and still no landfall. Blake chafed at the delay, regretted his promise. The men he had so carefully drilled at the guns, all perched high in the superstructure on a useless lookout, the ship defenseless. No landfall yet, nobody to check the navigation. Where were they anyway?

His eyes wandered aimlessly from the bare steel deck beams over his head to the closed airport. He twisted uneasily on his bunk, wondered vaguely how he might get hold of the captain's sextant, hide aft on the poop out of sight of the bridge, perhaps get a shot at the sun through a break in the scudding clouds. His shoulder twinged as he turned, brought him back to a realization of his position. No use speculating on that. With only one arm, he couldn't work a sextant even if he managed to steal one. Why didn't they sight that lighthouse?

A dull roar echoed through the poop, followed by a sharp explosion. Gunfire! Blake stiffened, slid from his bunk, heaved away his robe, awkwardly drew on his coat. The rhythmic pulsing of the deck under his feet ceased abruptly. The engines had stopped. Blake ran unsteadily for the door, stopped, turned back, pawed

through his desk, hastily slipped a Colt automatic into his coat pocket, hurried down the passage to the poop, out on deck.

A shrill scream filled the air; a heavy cloud of vapor was shrouding the stacks. The safety valves had popped, the boilers were madly blowing off steam. Blake ran up the sloping poop, ducked past a tangle of temporary stays, clung to the rail on the high side of the poop while he scanned the horizon. For an instant his heart seemed to stop beating. Two miles off, a little on the starboard bow, was a submarine, her decks still awash, the smoking muzzle of her gun trained across their stem, a signal to heave to and send a boat fluttering from her chariot bridge.

And the *Ulysses*, instead of turning away to present her stern, which was the smallest target, and at the same time bring her quarterdeck guns into action while she fled, was coming to a dead stop. Blake glanced instinctively at the two guns behind him. As he feared—unmanned. And with the tompions still in the muzzles, with tarpaulins still lashed round the breeches to protect them from the seas. In the war zone and the guns not even cast loose and provided!

With a curse he turned forward, started to motion wildly with his one good arm to the bluejackets he could see scrambling down the superstructure, to stand by their guns. For an instant he paused, sighted along the side toward the distant conning tower bobbing in the waves. Nearly dead ahead, too far forward for his guns to bear. He started to scramble down the ladder to the waist, ran wildly up the passage toward the bridge, yelling to the sailors as he passed.

"Stand by those guns! Open fire without orders when they bear!"

He saw the starboard gun pointer streak by him, take the ladder to the poop in two jumps, caught a glimpse of Johnson right behind him, turned his head a moment, saw the tarpaulin on the starboard gun ripped clear of the breech, go sailing over the side followed by the tompion, the black muzzle start to train forward, then stop. It would not bear. Heedless of cleats, of obstructions fouling the passage, Blake ran headlong for the bridge, flew up the ladder, leaped through the railing to find Bergstrom with "stop" rung up on both engine telegraphs, calmly surveying the U-boat through his glasses.

"The guns don't bear, Captain!" yelled Blake, trying to make himself heard against the roar of escaping steam. "Hard a'starboard and full speed, quick!"

Bergstrom dropped his glasses, looked at Blake in amazement.

"I t'ought you vas done for. Get oud of here!"

Blake stopped short, stared blankly at Bergstrom.

"Aren't you going to fight?"

"Fight? Against a U-boat? Ve're a collier, not a battleship! Of course not. Vun torpedo und ve sink!"

Blake's lip curled, his eyes narrowed as he listened. The damned coward! But coward or not, action must be quick before that sub got within torpedo range, or it would be too late.

"We're just offshore. Get that sub astern; if she stays on the surface, I'll keep 'er off with our guns so she can't close to torpedo range; submerged she'll never catch us. Quick! And get out an SOS. while we're running. There'll be destroyers here in less'n an hour!"

"SOS?" Bergstrom waved at the broken topmasts. Blake glanced up. No antennæ. "Close ashore, hey? I got a sight yust now. Ve ain't vere ve t'ought. Look at the chart!"

Blake whirled, thrust aside the canvas curtain over the hooded chart board, peered at the chart. Down the coast, close inshore was a pencil line, from the Orkneys due south, with neat little circles surrounding the punch marks for their dead reckoning positions watch by watch, as the captain had successively pricked them in, ending in a little circle not ten miles off the coast near the Tyne, certainly in easy sight of land. And there, far to the eastward of their supposed

track, freshly plotted in was another pencil track down the center of the North Sea straight for Helgoland, ending in a bold cross hardly fifty miles north of that German fortress!

Blake's knees weakened as he stared at that cross. The *Ulysses*, steaming practically into the jaws of the enemy fleet! Like a flash, a dozen unrelated incidents shot through his brain. Bergstrom's objection to a Naval officer, his rush to sail from Rio, his strange opposition to Blake's navigating, the sealed orders diverting them to Newcastle.

Who besides Bergstrom had ever actually seen those orders?

And then his insane obstinacy in refusing, in spite of a howling gale, to put into Liverpool, his devotion to duty in making his North Sea port on time. Devotion to duty! Everything fitted together, focused suddenly on that cross where lay the *Ulysses* and her priceless cargo of manganese, hopeless of escape, delivered under the enemy's guns!

Imperceptibly as Blake crouched under the hood of the chart board, his right hand slid into his coat; he whirled suddenly to find Bergstrom, pistol half drawn, tugging frantically at his pocket to free it.

"You damned traitor!" Blake jerked his arm upward, a streak of red flared through his coat.

Bergstrom staggered, his pocket tore wide open, the muzzle of his pistol lifted unsteadily, flashed twice in quick succession. In a red haze, Blake fired again, squarely into the captain's broad chest, saw him pitch forward, the pistol clatter to the deck. Without pausing, Blake kicked the pistol across the bridge, out of reach of the fingers convulsively clawing at the deck gratings, spinning as he dragged his Colt clear of his coat, to face the helmsman who was staring transfixed at the unexpected tragedy.

Blake prodded him with the smoking muzzle, galvanized him into sudden action.

"Hard a'starboard!" gritted Blake through his clenched teeth, then jerked round to see the quartermaster stooping over the captain's quivering body.

"Belay that!"

The startled quartermaster looked up at the wild eyed lieutenant standing over him, leaped hastily to his feet.

"Man those engine telegraphs!" shouted Blake. "Full ahead, both engines!"

Bells clanged, the wheel spun madly round as Blake backed to the rear of the bridge where he could watch both men at once. Through the corner of his eye he saw a broad trickle of red running down the sloping deck of the bridge, saw Bergstrom's legs still twitching spasmodically.

The shriek of escaping steam stopped sharply, to be followed by a sudden silence through which the throbbing of the screws became audible. The engines were taking the steam again; the boiler safety valves had seated. Slowly the *Ulysses*' jackstaff started to swing round the horizon; they were picking up steerageway.

Steadying himself against the bridge rail, Blake looked out ahead. Black smoke was pouring from the stern of the U-boat as her hull emerged farther from the water. Surprised apparently by the unexpected maneuver of her victim, she was preparing to give chase on the surface where she could develop maximum speed.

For an instant Blake watched as more men poured out her conning tower, caught occasional flashes of light against her gray hull as brass cartridge cases whirled down from her chariot bridge into the hands of the loaders silhouetted against the sky. The *U-183*, a cruiser submarine. Blake's heart sank as he read the number painted under her bridge. They were outranged; that class carried 5.9 guns.

The *Ulysses* with her four-inch rifles, her huge bulk for a target, would be no match against that enemy. Hundreds of miles from the British coast, from possible help, they could never escape. Bergstrom had done his job. Blake looked from the distant submarine to the huddled mass at his feet, silent now on the deck. He, at least, would never profit by his treachery.

A sharp explosion aft, a shell went screaming by the bridge, burst in a cloud of spray near the *U-183*. Instinctively Blake spotted it. A hundred yards short, deflection three knots left. His starboard gun was bearing now, had opened fire.

An officer scrambled up the bridge ladder, stopped short as he stumbled against the skipper's corpse, caught sight of the whitefaced seamen, then recoiled suddenly before the powder stained first officer clutching a pistol behind them.

"Blimey, wot's hup?" Higgins paused irresolutely.

"Just shot a damned Hun," said Blake shortly. "We're in a trap, Higgins! Bergstrom's landed us right off Helgoland! Rendezvous all set, U-boat on the spot to take us in."

A roar interrupted him. Johnson had fired again. Blake paused, watched the splash. Still too much left. No hope of hitting till the *Ulysses* finished her turn.

Higgins stooped, picked up Bergstrom's pistol.

"Any more 'Uns 'ere, Leftenant?" He looked significantly at the shaking quartermaster.

"Don't know," answered Blake briefly. "Better stand by till I get a few o' my bluejackets here to make sure."

He stepped to the voice tube to the poop, punched the bell viciously, rattled out a crisp order, stepped back to Higgins' side. Three sailors hastily left the poop. In a few moments a sentry, rifle in hand, stood in each wing of the bridge; another posted himself abaft the wheel.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE, one eye protruding from its socket, the other half blinded from the blood caked on his forehead, leaned weakly against the shattered side of the bridge, brushed his good arm across his face to clear his sight of the warm stream trickling from a fresh gash in his head. That last shell had settled it. He stared at the wreckage of the wheel, made out dimly through the yellow smoke of the shell burst the crumpled forms of the helmsman, of the quartermaster; saw at his feet the raw mass that had been the nearest sentry.

It had been murder. For half an hour the *U-188* had been trailing them astern, just beyond range of their own guns, firing deliberately at their superstructure, carefully avoiding hits on their badly heeled hull.

A direct hit had dismounted the port quarter gun and wiped out its whole crew. From the bridge Blake had seen the burst, the gun carriage topple, slide overboard, then only a heap of smoldering bodies where a second before there had been mad activity.

Undismayed, from the starboard counter, high up on the listing collier, Chief Gunner's Mate Johnson and the other gun crew, the muzzle of their four-inch gun at maximum elevation, had coolly kept up their fire, trying to reach the U-boat far astern of them. But their shots fell short of the wary submarine, and sick at heart, Blake had watched shell after shell from the enemy's 5.9 crash down out of the sky, while the stricken *Ulysses* strove desperately to draw out of range.

Hopelessly Blake had called the radio room, to learn their set had been dead for days; Bergstrom had avoided making repairs after the storm. No possibility of calling a chance warship, which might be raiding into the Helgoland Bight, to their aid.

"Hi see it now," Higgins groaned. "We're way overdue in Baltimore. An' 'e ayn't been wantin' Sparks 'ere pickin' up no messages arskin' other ships maybe to search fer us. An' 'ere we be, sinkin' in the middle o' the North Sea while the Navy's scoutin' fer us off the Bahamas!"

Blake scanned their distant pursuer.

"I suppose those Heines're wondering what's gone wrong here; it must have been all set for Bergstrom to surrender and sail right in."

A shell exploded amidships, tore the covers off of the No. 5 hatch. As the smoke drifted off Higgins shook his fist over the rail.

"Ye 'Uns, come up an' fight like men!"

"They're in a hell of a pickle," swore Blake. "They don't dare sink us. They want that manganese. All they're after now is to pound our decks till we surrender."

"The blarsted devils!" broke in the second mate. "It'd serve 'em jolly well right if we sunk 'er ourselves an' took to the boats. But we ayn't got a boat left," he added mournfully, "an' as fer swimmin', they wouldn't even stop to pick us hup. Matey—" he clapped Blake on the back—"wot'd ye give fer a six-inch gun?"

A six-inch gun? For an instant Blake's mind went back to that shining pair of fourteen-inch guns in his old turret on the *Texas*. Any gun that would reach that sleek demon far astern, that, as calmly as if at target practise, was making of their deck a shambles!

Another flash from the *U-183*, then the sickening seconds while the projectile whistled toward them. It struck a guy on the stack, exploded. A shower of splinters swept the quarter-deck. The men loading the starboard gun crumpled suddenly, sagged to the deck; a cartridge case slid out the half closed breech, clattered to the deck. Blake gazed aft, waiting momentarily for the crew to spring up, reload. No one stirred. The silent muzzle pointed aimlessly skyward.

"Higgins!" Blake seized his arm. "Get aft, see if you can get together another crew for that gun!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Higgins saluted, slid down the ladder.

The *U-183*, quick to note the cessation of resistance, had speeded up, hurriedly closed to less than a mile, concentrated its fire on the bridge, in a few short range shots practically torn it to pieces. And now with his bridge shattered, engines stopped, steerage gone, the ship helpless at last, the sorely wounded first officer looked dizzily aft through a film of blood at the *U-183*. It was submerged now, and steaming slowly round the wrecked *Ulysses*, cautiously surveying her through a periscope to make sure all possibility of resistance was beaten out, that no masked guns were anywhere concealed to come suddenly into action when she approached to put aboard a prize crew, rig up a jury steering gear and take her victim into port.

A burning hatred surged through Blake's tortured breast as he followed the feather of spray in the wake of that gleaming periscope. Cowards! They had not fought; his shipmates had been trapped, butchered without a chance. He staggered, bleeding, from the bridge. The engine room. Open the Kingston valves, sink the ship himself, boats or no boats. The Huns should never get that manganese. He stumbled down the lee passage, crawled over the torn booms clogging it. Never! The *Ulysses*' cargo must not help the enemy to rain death upon his old shipmates in the fleet, on the khaki clad doughboys streaming across the ocean to the trenches on the Western Front.

As Blake staggered through the waves swashing over the half submerged rail, he caught another glimpse of that sinister periscope, just heading past their floundering bow. If only the *Ulysses* could leap suddenly ahead, ram their destroyer. Hopeless. No further chance to fight. All he could do was to cheat them of their prize.

And then a wild idea shot through his dizzy brain. The submarine probably had no boat; she would have to come alongside to board. Undoubtedly when satisfied the *Ulysses* could offer no effective resistance, she would break surface again, sidle up to the low side, her boarding party rifles in hand, would leap across the bulwark to the collier's deck. At his mercy. Yes, he could do it. The ash-cans at their stern!

Blake came to the poop, climbed the ladder. A berserk rage gripped him as his throbbing eyes swept the quarterdeck. Torn and bleeding bodies, naked limbs yellowed with picric acid from bursting shells, lay in heaps round the silent guns. To starboard a solitary survivor, struggling on his knees, was clinging to the breech plug, trying futilely to swing it

home against a cartridge case which Higgins had slammed into the breech.

Blake watched an instant, shook his head. No use for guns any more. The *Ulysses* could not maneuver. The sub would come up where no gun would bear, even if he scratched up a crew among the untrained merchantmen cowering below decks to escape the bursting shells.

"Higgins! Belay that now; lend a hand aft!"

Higgins dropped the shell, picked his way among the corpses to Blake's side. The wounded seaman at the breech, his strength gone, let go the plug, sank to the deck, with glassy eyes followed the trail of foam just showing on the starboard bow.

"Quick, the depth bombs! Get one amidships ready for 'em when they board!"

Higgins stopped short. His thin face went suddenly white.

"But wot if it sinks us too, Leftenant? There ayn't no boats!"

"Our number's up then, I guess. We won't bellyache. Come on, old man!" Blake staggered to the stern, drew out his knife, started awkwardly to hack away at the manila lashings which held the little string of depth charges in the rack alongside the flagstaff.

"'Ere, lemme 'elp." Higgins was crouching at his side, slashing vigorously. A few more cuts, the lashings parted, Higgins tipped the inboard ashcan end over end out of the rack.

Gingerly at first, then more rapidly as Blake spotted the wash of their enemy coming down the starboard side, the two men rolled the steel cylinder across the poop, dodged the ghastly obstructions littering the deck, got it to the ladder. Higgins cut a section of the boatfall draped over a smashed lifeboat nearby, took a few hitches round the bomb, eased the three hundred pounds of TNT down the steep steps while Blake gently guided it. Once in the passage, they worked it forward up the port side, dragged it through the water till they came at last amidships, fair with a freeing port in the bulwark. Working in seas nearly up to his waist, Higgins lifted the hinged plate in the bulwark, Blake rolled the depth charge under the plate, then outboard till it hung part way through the opening, restrained only from dropping free by a single turn of line passed once round a cleat, wound round his wrist.

"Duck!" whispered Blake fiercely.

THEY were just in time. Breaking surface on the port quarter, the *U-183* rose smoothly from the sea, first her conning tower, then her gun appearing as little islands in a mass of foam, followed immediately by her tapering deck and her sleek round sides, while water in torrents gushed down her superstructure.

Higgins and Blake crouched low behind the bulwark, looked out through the crack just over the freeing port. Blake's wounds smarted afresh as he dropped low into the salt water flooding the passage; but he grunted with satisfaction as he noted that their depth charge was covered by at least a foot of water. It would be invisible.

A hatch flew open on the *U-183*, a stream of dungaree clad sailors poured up from her conning tower; the first few manned the gun, the others following gathered in a little knot abreast the conning tower, rifles in hand ready to board and take charge of their prize.

Slowly, silently, the *U-183* glided through the water, closed obliquely on the helpless collier, stopped a hundred yards off. As he watched, the black muzzle of her 5.9 rifle swung abeam, trained on their poop, ready for instant action in case the abandoned gun aft were remanned. Blake caught a glimpse of an officer leaning over the side of the chariot bridge, saw a pair of gold laced sleeves rise above the rail, a pair of binoculars start to scan the tilted deck of the *Ulysses* for any sign of resistance.

Satisfied with his inspection, the U-boat captain dropped his glasses, shouted down

the hatch; the submarine moved closer.

Fascinated, Blake's straining eyes watched the approach of their enemy.

"Goodby, Leftenant! Don't muff it!"

Blake looked up. Higgins, like himself, submerged in water up to his neck, had just dragged his eyes from his peephole, was staring at him with chalky face and chattering teeth.

"No fear, old man," whispered Blake. "I'll wait for him."

He gripped the line more tightly, gazed up for the last time through the torn steel towers over his head to the cloudy sky above, then clenched his teeth, peered out again over the tumbling waves. Close now, not fifty feet away, swinging gently in, he saw the sharp stem of the U-boat glide by him, the serrated jaws of her net cutter sticking cruelly above the deck. Now the gun was passing, its muzzle seemed near enough to touch.

A rumble in the water, a mass of foam astern, the *U-183* reversed, stopped, was practically alongside. Straining his eyes upward, he saw a line of German sailors with bayonets poised, balanced on the rail of their boat, ready to leap. It was time.

Blake let go the line, felt it slip through his fingers; the pressure of the rounded ashcan against his legs disappeared. He took his eyes from the rail, turned his head.

"Goodby, Hig—"

A terrible roar, a geyser of water erupted suddenly alongside. The *Ulysses* rocked violently. But the *U-183*, lifted bodily out of water, heaved up amidships, broke in two. Like leaves in a gale, the men on her deck were whirled upward in a vast column of water and smoke, fell back unnoticed into a sea boiling with foam. For a brief instant the two ends of the U-boat pointed high in air, then as the shock subsided, slid swiftly through the surface, disappeared.

The *Ulysses*, her port side crushed in by the same blow, lay for a moment quivering as the sea poured through the gap into her half empty holds; wreckage, dismembered bodies, huge quantitites of water rained down on her from the sky. Then as the inrushing ocean destroyed her slight stability, she lurched suddenly to port, like a wounded giant, rolled slowly over on her side.

Her masts and her coaling towers cut through the waves, disappeared. Bottom up, with smooth red hull and bronze propellers glistening against the gray sky, she lay a moment; then, stern first, the *Ulysses* slipped gently through the surface of the sea, vanished forever from the sight of men.

By GEORGES SURDEZ

The BUFFOON

A Story of the Foreign Legion

ARMAND CORBU was not mad. Those who know the Foreign Legion know his type, understand the real motives behind his actions, and do not consider what occurred at Dar-Tuadahu, in the Moroccan Mid-Atlas, as wholly a tragedy. Legionnaires neither blame nor pity him, but grant him instead a certain measure of sincere, amused admiration. Corbu achieved the result he sought, probably realized an ideal, and could not have asked for more than that in one incarnation.

As always, when men meet with established reputations to uphold, it was to be expected that there would be a clash of wills. Captain Sorval was a veteran Legionnaire and from the first deemed a match for Corbu.

Dar-Tuadahu was a picturesque, ancient city of the hills, squatted in a tawny depression in the green slopes, straddling a silvery stream. It was windswept and bleak in Winter, turned into a furnace in Summer. At the time, it was a principal post, supplied the numerous small garrisons that held a chain of blockhouses and guard towers on the extreme fringe of the hostile zone. The city itself was well within the pacified territory, officially; nevertheless, it was unwise to stroll outside the walls after sunset. Even strong

patrols and fatigue parties were attacked occasionally.

The chief of the Legion company, Gustave Sorval, known as Tatave throughout the corps, seemed to be made of metal. His god was the regimental flag, his religion discipline, his Bible the military code; he held enshrined in his steely heart the holy names of General Négrier, soul of the modern Legion, and of Villebois-Mareuil, Legionnaire and adventurer par excellence, once colonel of the First Regiment, slain during the Boer War.

He was a symbol rather than a being, a cog performing precisely and punctually the mechanical functions needed to run his company. He followed a routine which included the right amount of muscular activity and the proper dose of "intellectual recreation". He received a case of books every three months, magazines every week, and it was said that he sent in solutions to chess problems. He smoked three cigars each day, possibly as a concession to human weakness.

The subalterns in the company, Lieutenant Clerc and Sub-Lieutenant Vignetti, were skeptical, modern young Frenchmen. Yet they confessed a deep awe of their chief. Clerc, a product of military school, offered various psychological explanations. Vignetti, a robust Corsican risen from the ranks, derived his emotions from more obvious sources.

"Tatave is cold blooded, it's not a pretense," he said. "When I was a sergeant in the Tonkin, he was my lieutenant. One night—that was in a small post on the Chinese frontier—a tiger leaped over the surrounding wall. The sentry on the watch platform, a Swiss Legionnaire from Basle, did not lose his nerve, and dropped that great cat like an ordinary rabbit. At the detonation, we all rushed out with lanterns, and we were yelling with excitement when Tatave appeared.

" 'Order!' he snapped. 'What's the idea of the uproar?'

"He was in his nightshirt, and the black hair on his calves bristled. But he was dignified, wore his *képi*. The Swiss explained, talking rapidly, trembling but very proud of himself. Tatave cut him off with a hard look, motioned for me to lower the lantern I held nearer the animal.

" 'Quite dead,' he informed us. 'Remove that carcass—I want this yard clean in the morning.'

"He left as calmly as he had come. But here's the best of the story: When he signed my report on the ammunitions we had used up, he added in red ink on the margin, 'One cartridge, to dispose of a tiger strayed within post limits.' "

Sorval made a habit of not noticing his men's actions outside the line of duty. Many liked this, but it was the bane of the many individualists in the Legion, the men who made a point of pride to attract their chiefs' attention, to be thought apart from the normal, the "nuts", the "phenomenona", the "fantastics".

When Corbu's arrival was announced, Vignetti, who was familiar with the lore of the regiments, told his comrade, Clerc, that the immovable object was about to clash with the irresistible force.

"It will be a circus," he continued. "Sorval will refuse to cater to Corbu's ego. Obscurity is unbearable to Corbu, and he will go to any length. On the other hand, you've heard Old Tatave say several times that he would not tolerate self-appointed *loustics** in his company."

THE sergeant in charge of the telegraph office kept the Legionnaires informed of Corbu's progress. The detachment of which he considered himself the star was on the march south from Meknes. Ito, Azrud and way places reported him in turn. He was drunk, he was sober, he had done this or that. Once he threw a quart bottle into a passenger bus; elsewhere he fought a policeman. At Khenifra, where the group rested two days, he won a bet—drinking twelve glasses of cognac while a clock struck twelve, then leaping over four chairs lined up before him.

**loustic:* French military slang word meaning a gay, happy, humorous fellow, a practical joker.

"Remember," Vignetti urged, "that he's over forty. I have seen his name in citation lists dating back to 1907."

Clerc and Vignetti contrived to be in the company's office when the detachment arrived. Tatave sat behind his table like a graven image, tunic buttoned snugly under his hard chin, signing documents with an automatic flourish. Sergeant Stulpnagel, the red faced German who had commanded the group, entered, saluted, reported.

"Trouble on the way?" Sorval asked sharply.

"Not much, Captain." Stulpnagel smiled with indulgence. "Of course, there was Corbu—"

"Who's he?"

"Why, Legionnaire Corbu; Armand Corbu—"

"I gather that he misbehaved. Please ask him to report here at once."

"He may be a little drunk, Captain."

"At once."

Within five minutes a Legionnaire appeared. He hesitated a moment on the threshold, because the room was a black pocket in contrast with the sunlit yard. Then he stiffened his shoulders, swaggered in.

After a smart salute he stood at attention.

"A moment," Sorval said, writing.

Silence fell like a cloak of lead; a fly buzzed noisily against the plastered ceiling. The Legionnaire waited. He was rather tall, very thin, with gaunt, stooped shoulders. At the end of a seamed, wrinkled neck swung a huge, tanned, shaven face, criss-crossed by grayish ridges of loose skin. The protruding eyes, water-blue, considered the officers with a puzzled stare. There was something of the gnome, more of the clown, in the fellow.

He identified Vignetti, whom he had known in the past, saluted again. The silence, the tension, made him nervous, for he shifted his boots uneasily, coughed. The captain did not look up. Two minutes passed.

Suddenly, Corbu came to a decision. He held a cupped hand before his mouth like a bugle, and blared the first bars of the "Legion's March." Sorval did not raise his eyes, reached for the next paper on the pile. At last the song died out.

"Who are you?" Tatave asked at length.

"Corbu, Armand, matricular No. 5409, *mon Capitaine.* Serving fourth enlistment, military medal man, twice proposed for the Cross; personally congratulated by General d'Amade at Sebd-ul-Bahr, Dardanelles, in 1915."

Sorval laid the pen neatly on the table, adjusted its position with a flick of one finger before speaking.

"I'm an old Legionnaire myself; we should understand each other. I have heard of you; you have heard of me. That said, we pass the sponge on what you have done so far, and start anew."

"Right, Captain."

"You're a lad who loves to astonish the population. Outside service matters, I have no objections to that. I regret to inform you that in the line of duty I seldom tolerate fantasy. Moreover, your efforts will be wasted on me. I have been in the Legion a long time." Sorval nodded in self-approval, concluded, "*Moi, j'suis un type qu'on n'épate pas.*"

The captain inspected Corbu from foot to *képi*, slowly, deliberately, shook his head in a puzzled gesture before going on.

"Me—I'm a guy who is not to be astonished," he repeated. "All you can do, I have seen done before. All you can say, I have heard before. I've known Legionnaires fifteen years, and you can't invent anything to startle me. Personally, I shall pay no attention to your pranks. But as your captain I shall certainly take measures to stop your clowning, your attempts to ridicule your superiors. This is not a warning. I merely inform you. Understood?"

"Understood, Captain."

"Your manifestation, a moment ago, was childish. I shall not dignify it with an official notice."

"I thank you, Captain."

"I was curious to see you. But you're

no different from a half hundred chaps I've run across in my career. You're harmless enough—"

"Oh, certainly, Captain."

"You may go, Legionnaire."

Corbu saluted, pivoted, but the captain recalled him.

"By the way, Corbu—you will go at once to the company's tailor and have bugler's stripes stitched to your sleeves. You may leave."

Corbu stood as if turned to stone, gaping.

"I—I'm not a bugler, Captain."

"You seem to have ambition to become one."

"I can't play a note, Captain—"

"You'll learn. Not a word more. You, an old Legionnaire, can not discuss orders with a superior? Surely not. Good day, Corbu."

Sorval picked up the pen, signed papers. A few seconds after the Legionnaire had left, sheepishly, the captain spoke again, addressing his lieutenants without turning.

"The show is ended. Perhaps you gentlemen could resume the usual routine?"

Clerc and Vignetti left without protest.

THEY spoke to no one of the scene, but there had been in all probability unseen witnesses, for the details of the interview were known throughout the town by nightfall. It was granted that Sorval had won the first skirmish, and that Corbu had met his match. A less experienced officer would have punished the "bugler" with four days in the lockup for improper conduct. That would have acknowledged anger. But as it was, the slanting braid threaded with red would be a permanent reminder to Corbu that his chief used his wits more than his power.

The garrison divided into two clans. A few held out for Corbu, made bets that he would avenge himself in the end. The majority of the Legionnaires, knowing Sorval, insisted that the private's every move would be met with the same skill. No one could predict the outcome—it was unthinkable that Corbu would admit defeat when his reputation was at stake.

The music instructor took Corbu in charge, and for several hours of each day, the old Legionnaire could be seen practising by the river bank with the band. Comparative recruits, who were not sorry to see one of the vain veterans humiliated, did not spare him cutting chaff. Corbu retorted hotly, and usually won the verbal encounters. But he was sad and bitter. When he was drunk, which was rather often, he would broach the subject at slight provocation.

"He got me, that's so! But wait; sure as there's anisette in that glass that won't be there in a minute, I'll astonish him. I've been in the Legion longer than he has—enlisted long before the War, served everywhere. I'll show him."

Men laughed.

Had Sorval been an outsider, an officer recently transferred from the Line Infantry or the Colonial Army, Corbu could have passed as a martyr to a chief's ignorance of traditions. Under the circumstances, he could only accept the challenge, and try to coax from the captain a public expression of surprise, an unguarded gesture of astonishment. Even a laugh forced from the officer would settle accounts. But for a long while it appeared as easy to stir the captain to wonder as to sew buttons with a bayonet.

Corbu no doubt spent much time thinking of various methods. Volunteered suggestions were not lacking, either. But the majority of the schemes were too wild, departed from the tacit rules of the game being played.

The old Legionnaire finally resorted to a trick which, while childish and obvious, seen in the solemnity of a military display was amusing. Somewhere, somehow, he obtained a quantity of cock's feathers. These he matched carefully, color and size, and manufactured a sort of fan three feet long, two feet wide—a rather clever bit of workmanship. This object he attached to the seat of his trousers like a tail by means of various hooks and pins.

Corbu was reasonably certain that upon seeing this appendage the captain would manifest some feeling, anger if not amusement. On inspection day, having fortified himself with a bottle of wine, he started out with the fan concealed under the back of his tunic, folded neatly, ready to be pulled down and hoisted into place with a system of strings and wires of his invention.

When Sorval came marching down the line, the tail appeared unexpectedly, spread and shimmered in the sun. But Corbu was disappointed, for the captain did not appear to notice it. He had such control over himself that no one was *sure* he had seen the thing until some minutes later.

Tatave had returned to the front of the company, had spoken with the lieutenants and sergeants, as usual. But instead of dismissing the sections he held up his hand.

"At ease, Legionnaires."

Corbu stood with his chin high, the bugle resting on his thigh. He had stiffened the muscles of his calves, and the tail protruded at a smart angle. He could hear the front rank men of the trench mortar group choking, giggling like girls.

"A private in this company," Sorval said, "is under the impression that he has done something original, that he has proved himself above normal, well behaved soldiers. He probably has contemplated his handiwork as something novel, his deed as a new stunt. In the nineties, a gentleman by the name of Georges d'Esparbès visited regimental headquarters of the First Regiment at Sidi-bel-Abbès, observed the Legion for an entire fortnight, and armed with this lengthy experience, wrote a book about us.

"This book, in contrast with most writing about our corps, had a certain ring of truth and authority. Many authors have gone to it for information. D'Esparbès mentions the fondness of Legionnaires in certain mental states to show off by the wearing of ridiculous disguises in public places. Through those who have copied him, this has become a classic reaction of Legionnaires in fiction.

"A few young Legionnaires, too green to know better, have been known to clown thus publicly—the result of undigested reading in their early boyhood. I have seen such episodes before, notably at Gerryville, in 1913. Therefore, an old Legionnaire will be amused only at the foolishness of another old Legionnaire."

The captain strolled toward Corbu, circled him twice, slowly, without a smile, without a frown. He touched the tips of the feathers, noted the method of fastening. There was laughter in the ranks, but both the officer and Corbu knew against whom this mirth was directed. The Legion private moved to unfasten the tail, but Sorval stopped him.

"No, no—after drill, my friend. Company, attention! Shoulder arms—Lieutenant Clerc, assume charge."

The following hours were literally a hell for Corbu. And he paled, admitted defeat when the captain's decision was read to the sections the following day.

"Legionnaire Corbu, Armand, Matricular Number 5409: Two days confinement to quarters. Motivation: Appearing for inspection wearing insignia not attributed to his species by regulations."

IT MAY not be easy for a civilian to understand what two failures meant to Corbu—for a civilian may change his surroundings. As always, it seems necessary to establish a comparison between professional soldiers and schoolboys. Some one has said—or should have said—that men are simply boys grown larger. Corbu, not a bad man and certainly an excellent soldier, had retained a boyish sense of humor, a boy's desire to shine as a comic.

His ability to laugh himself out of scrapes into which his extravagant behavior had launched him had been his pride. It had been, as well, his only real distinction. For there were always, in any unit in which he served, men taller than he, stronger, more handsome, more in-

telligent. There were men who could drink more, and while he may have been as brave as any one, others had been more conspicuous in the field. Clowning had been his specialty; for the sake of keeping his reputation as a "clever guy," a "phenomenon", he had sacrificed promotion more than once.

He had encountered many types of officers in his career. Some had tried to cope with him with harsh measures, many had smiled and ignored him, not a few had frankly allied themselves with him, dignified with approval his self-appointed position as official jester. Captain Sorval was the first who had crossed wits with him, fenced as long as needed, then stabbed him with the sharp point of ridicule.

Even a buffoon has the pride of his art. There are very few stories of a king's jester being the loser in a clash of wits. Corbu's anguish when he had been publicly beaten at his own game was comparable to that of a fallen champion in any line.

His humor altered during the two days he spent in barracks. He was surly when he emerged, almost silent. Something had died within him, and he was unable to cope with the youngsters who teased him without mercy. For the first time in men's memory, he got into a fight with a Legionnaire, words having failed him.

Corbu was not a weakling. Undoubtedly, he was stronger than the majority of men of his years. Handling a rifle or a pick several hours each day for two decades had served him as well as gymnasium practise. But he selected a young, large, heavily muscled German as a scapegoat from the rest of his tormentors and was definitely overmatched.

It was a bizarre combat, in the shabby room of a cheap café. No man interfered —and all recognized an unsuspected quality in Corbu, a trait of character that was to develop and lead him farther than expected.

At the start, his opponent did not take the onslaught seriously. This seemed to be just another one of Corbu's jokes. But the impact of knuckles on flesh brought quick reaction, and soon the young private was in earnest. Had he been a boxer of any ability, Corbu would have been knocked out very soon. But the German was ignorant, if powerful. Half of his blows went wild, but those that reached home hurt. Corbu staggered, fell, rose, bounced off the hard floor with fists swinging.

The Moorish women hid their faces and screamed. They were from the hills and not at all soft hearted. But this mode of combat appeared brutal to them. For it is an odd fact that people who traditionally fight with blades are sickened by the impact of flesh on flesh.

Corbu was beaten like a drum, battered from hips to forehead. He was too old, too excited, to employ to advantage the lore he had acquired. A blow on the neck laid him low at last, and the café owner brought him to with a pail of water and a glass of brandy. When he did not recover completely, his frightened comrades took him to the hospital. Doctors wondered later how much the repeated shocks, as his head had struck the floor, had contributed to his actions.

It may be that the captain understood and was contrite. No one could be sure, as he never expressed his intimate thoughts. He visited Corbu, as was his duty, sat at the head of his cot, shook hands on arrival and departure. The Legionnaire, made sensitive by his misfortune, resented this surface interest. The more so because on the first interview Sorval seemed to make clear that his attitude had not changed, that he refused to concede the private any superiority.

"Don't punish the young chap, Captain," Corbu begged him. "I started it."

"I've heard. You're a fool, old man."

"Yes, Captain—the biggest fool you ever saw."

"Oh, no, no—" Sorval protested hastily.

As his bruises vanished, Corbu took to sitting up on his cot, hands locked over his knees, staring endlessly into space. Others said later that he had repeated, in a bewildered voice:

"Always saw bigger and better. Nothing surprises him. Nothing."

The medical major of the region, arriving on inspection, greeted Corbu like an old friend. They had met many times in the past, in many queer places, from Agadir to the Sea of Japan, and were well acquainted.

"Corbu, you've served nearly twenty years," the major said. "I'll slate you for discharge and pension. I'll find a soft job in civil life for you, in Algeria. Stupid for old fools like us to pick fights with youngsters. One can not be and have been."

"I'm good for ten years more," Corbu protested. "The devil, Major, that guy has licked plenty of big boys his own age worse than he beat me. There's no shame in it—and no proof that I'm too old for service."

"To tell you the truth," the major resumed, "you're near the end of the path. It's not that licking that matters. But your liver's like a rock. Even in civilian life, you'll have to take good care of yourself to last five years."

"You mean I might die in five years?"

"Unless you cut out wine, liquors, excesses of all sorts."

Corbu lighted a cigaret, smiled at the major.

"You mean I won't be buried for ten years if I die now."

"I'll arrange for a pension," the major promised.

"How long will that take?"

"You know the army, old man. Anywhere from three to six months. Meanwhile, I'll recommend you for sick leave."

"Please don't. I'd sooner stay here, Major."

"All right. I'll ask the captain to give you a soft job."

"No, Major. I'm a bugler, anyway."

"Don't want favors from him, do you?"

"No, Major. You've heard why, of course?"

"Naturally."

"Could you tell me—" Corbu hesitated, his face red—"could you tell me if they've heard about what happened to me here—in Meknes—in the regiment?"

"You know the Legion—gossip . . ."

"Everybody laughed at me, eh, Major?"

"A little, I must admit."

Corbu winced. He shook hands with the major, bade him goodby. But his mind was elsewhere, and when the other men in the ward resumed their joking, he did not reply for a long time. At length he addressed them—

"You guys are having a good time, aren't you?"

"Not bad, thanks. From the way the major spoke, you must have been a good guy once. But then you had never gone up against Tatave, had you?"

"No." Corbu smiled. "Want to know something?"

"You were hot stuff in 1908. We heard that already."

"Think nobody can surprise Sorval?"

"You should know."

"I'll show you."

"What will you do?"

"You'll see."

WHETHER Corbu could have found his plan at the time or whether he drifted along with shifting events, no one can tell. Captain Sorval put him in an office when he was discharged from the hospital. But the Legionnaire declared himself fed up with such work very soon, asked his chief for an occupation out of doors.

"I like the sun, Captain. Inside, I feel queer."

So the officer sought a new employment. There was a detachment of military prisoners in the region—Frenchmen, mainly. Guards were needed. Sorval nominated Corbu for this service, explaining that the private thus would work out of doors and have little physical effort to make.

For several weeks Corbu appeared contented with his job. He showed himself to possess authority and tact, the eight prisoners he watched liked him and worked well. The civil engineer in charge of road construction in the sector praised him highly. When a squad was needed to re-

main at a point some distance from Dar-Tuadahu, Corbu's group was selected.

He was given four Moroccan Tirailleurs, native soldiers armed with excellent Lebel rifles. They were to assist him at all times, but it was expected that their principal purpose would be to defend the laboring prisoners against possible attack by the hillmen.

These Tirailleurs returned to Dar-Tuadahu less than a week after Corbu had left for his new assignment. They were bringing back five of the eight prisoners, but they had been deprived of rifles and bayonets.

The story they related was so queer that it was not believed immediately. But the absence of Corbu and subsequent events proved it essentially true.

The Tirailleurs declared that they had been under the impression that Corbu was a sort of acting sergeant. Therefore, when he had ordered them to report before him without their guns, they had obeyed even though they were surprised. Their first knowledge that something was wrong had come when they were threatened by their prisoners, armed with the Lebel rifles they had left behind.

The prisoners informed the intelligence officer that as soon as they had been out of sight of Dar-Tuadahu, Corbu had offered to escape with them into the hills. Five, serving short sentences, had preferred to remain behind and report to the authorities. The other three, known for their incorrigibility, all of them condemned to eight years' hard labor and having an average of six years more ahead of them, had accepted the Legionnaire's offer.

Detachments of Legion, of colonial infantry, troops of riders, were sent out to recapture the fugitives, scoured the region. Military planes came from Meknes, circled low over the hills. Secret agents kept by France in the hostile zone were questioned. But the four men had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed them.

The first precise news of them arrived at Dar-Tuadahu the same day that headquarters sent word that Legionnaire Corbu, eligible for pension, was to report at Meknes. Sorval accepted the tidings without visible emotion, but could not have been pleased.

While not altogether unheard of, the reported exploits of the ex-prisoners and their leader did not lack a picturesque, daring appeal. They had stormed a friendly *douar*, a very small hamlet. They had killed four or five men, wounded several more, put the rest of the male population to flight. They had stayed in the houses all night, drinking, carousing, to vanish again in the morning, before the reenforcements from neighboring villages could reach the spot.

Tales did not agree. Some witnesses claimed that the Frenchmen had been backed by hillmen from the hostile zone. Others insisted that they had been alone, just four men. But all agreed that Corbu was in the lead, and had figured prominently in both the fighting and what had followed.

Official Morocco was aghast at this onslaught upon native allies. Investigators came from staff headquarters at Rabat, inquired gravely into Corbu's past, as if that mattered. The loyal chieftains were gathered, informed that the culprits would be caught, that justice would be done. The government evidently feared that the natives so recently won to accept French rule would turn back to their former allegiance because of a few Europeans' misbehavior.

After such a pretty start Corbu and his followers sought new conquests. Reports of their brigandage came from both sides of the tacit frontier established between the French held land and the enemy tribes. The little gang burned, pillaged, killed, friend or foe indiscriminately.

A youth captured by the bandits was released. He complained of bad treatment, but brought the first real news of the deserter. Corbu, it seemed, had only one regret. The alcoholic drinks found in native dwellings were too mild for his taste. For two weeks the searching parties returned to report failure. Then a woman

at last revealed the actual hiding place of the band.

Detachments of troops, backed by several hundred native riders, surrounded the spot indicated. One of the prisoners was recaptured in the bushes, and led the soldiers to a hole under the high bank of a mountain stream, in which he had left his comrades.

THEY refused to yield peacefully, and Sorval who was in charge of the operations, ordered that no one was to take needless risks. Shots were exchanged all day long, without casualties. At night, two groups of ten men each rushed the entrance from opposite directions, and overpowered the defenders. One was killed, another wounded in the struggle. Patrols searched the cave with electric torches, for Corbu had not been found. The hunt was called off when the surviving prisoners talked.

They had quarreled with the Legionnaire the day before, when he had reproached them with allowing the woman to escape after having been brought to their shelter. They had admitted the truth of his argument, and asked him to help them out of their difficulties. It seemed that Corbu had a certain talent for locating hiding places. Several times, the prisoners related, they had been within sight of their pursuers; they had peered up at the scouting planes from beneath shelters made of branches.

After the row, Corbu had gone out to locate a new home. As he had done this before several times, his followers had had no reason to suspect his good faith. They did not imagine that any man could elect to be alone in the hills. But Corbu had not come back, and the man captured in the open had been sent to locate him.

The prisoners were dirty, bearded, and evidently dazed and bewildered. They blamed Corbu, who had tempted them to escape, had provided them with guns and an illusion of liberty. They said that most of the killings had been at his orders—that Corbu had a sort of magnetic power over them, that they could not refuse to obey.

"He's a devil, that chap—"

Taken back to Dar-Tuadahu, they willingly marked on the map produced by Captain Sorval the various hiding places they had occupied during their month of freedom. Patrols made the round from one to the other, but failed to find traces of Corbu's recent sojourn in any of them.

"It's astonishing," Lieutenant Clerc stated. "How does he contrive to hide so well?"

"Instinct," Sorval pointed out without impatience. "Just as no jailer ever brings as close attention to keeping a prisoner in jail as that prisoner brings to get out—which explains escapes from the strongest fortress—pursuers never see a hiding place as clearly as a fugitive. There is really nothing amazing about it. Consider large cities, with all the police regulations as to papers of identity, which harbor thousands of criminals. Corbu has lived in the open for twenty years, therefore he has the knowledge of the hills, plus a desire to live, which makes him keener than we are."

The prisoners were sent to Meknes for trial. It was hoped that Corbu would be brought in to join them. But the trial progressed, and he was not captured. There was no verdict possible save guilty, no possible sentence save death. Even had the culprits not shed blood—and there were seven deaths listed against them and any number of outrages—they had forfeited their lives by carrying on a war against friendly tribes. An example must be made to uphold French prestige.

The wounded man was so certain of this that he hanged himself while in the hospital. The other two sat throughout the debates, staring dully, save for brief explosions of spirit, when they cursed society, the army and their judges.

"You sent us to Africa! Why did you treat us like beasts? You reaped what you sowed."

They insulted the native witnesses, the youth, the women. Then came the day

when they were marched into a silent room, to face the tribune left vacant by the court-martial while the sentence was read.

"Death—death—death—"

It was decided by the court that they should be taken back to the scene of their crimes to atone, to Dar-Tuadahu. The friendly native population could be gathered there to see justice carried out. Legionnaire Corbu was convicted and sentenced to death by default.

"Sentence to be carried out immediately upon capture."

On the day set for the double execution, which had been scheduled to take place at an later hour than was usual—the paths of the hills swarmed with *burnoused* figures, with long files of mules, horses, donkeys, bearing women; children capered and shrilled.

There was more curiosity than genuine hatred or desire for revenge in that crowd. For the inhabitants of the Middle Atlas understand violence too well to have felt deep indignation. What the men about to be shot had done had not been worse than the depredations carried on, since the beginning of time, by raiding bands in intertribal warfare.

The chief attraction was undoubtedly the rare spectacle of Christians shot down by their own people. Through the eagerness to witness the show pierced puzzlement. Few of the mountaineers understood just why, when it would have been so easy to slay the culprits at the time they were caught, so many additional weeks of life had been granted them for trial—the outcome of which was obvious.

The Legion Company supplied the firing squad. Both men were to be shot at the same time, and short posts were planted in the ground, six feet apart. A loop of the rope holding their wrists would be slipped over the stakes.

The entire garrison was marched out as for a parade, to a wide, flat area outside the walls, called the Esplanade. Before the troops were risked away from their defenses, planes had scouted the border, to ascertain that there were no large bodies of hostile warriors on the move.

AT ELEVEN in the morning the streams of people flowing on the trails had formed a lake of humanity swelling against the sections of infantry. The native militia, in blue cloaks and wide turbans, formed a screen of mounted men. The turbulent crowd was silenced by a distribution of blows with clubs and saber scabbards. The droning planes swooping overhead across a blue, cloudless sky, served to allay the general impatience. Boys pointed at them, aiming imaginary rifles, imitating the whistling of falling bombs, the crash of explosions.

At last, bugles blared, drums thumped, and a group appeared, bristling with bayonets. The two prisoners were in the center. They halted by the posts, and knots of uniformed men concealed them from view.

A French official in a black frock coat read the judgement, then uttered a lengthy speech, in which he mentioned civilization, justice, friendship, honor, understanding between races, murder, execution, with more eloquence than logic.

"Wish he'd get it over with," Lieutenant Clerc said to Vignetti. "The poor devils will lose their nerve if they have to wait too long."

"That's not important," Tribaldi replied with a shrug. "What counts is the speech—far as that guy is concerned. He wouldn't care if they were released after he was through. But I do pity the poor slobs."

"I'd feel bad to see Corbu out there with them," Clerc added.

"He wouldn't mind if they'd let him wear his pretty feathered tail."

Both laughed.

An Arab official from Fez, wearing a red *burnous* on which gleamed many enameled crosses, repeated the speech in Arabic. The Legionnaires of the firing squad yawned, shifted restlessly, rested their weight on their grounded rifles.

Once the old sergeant in charge brought a pipe from his pocket. But he recalled the situation in time, and did not light it.

The man in red ceased speaking. But there was a third speech, by a hillman wearing a blue cloak and only two medals. He was eloquent in the local dialect, probably offered the two lives as a proof of civilization's advantages. There came a brief pause, and the civilian in black nodded to Captain Sorval.

The military being in charge, matters moved rapidly. The groups surrounding the posts dissolved, and the two men were exposed, blindfolded, motionless. An order cracked out, the rifles bristled. Then followed a ripping discharge.

Two huddled figures were sprawled by the posts.

Justice was done.

The sergeant walked forward, fired the mercy shots.

"Shoulder arms!"

The sections moved in perfect timing, the blades gleamed swiftly. The chief of the musicians looked expectantly toward Sorval for the signal to play. For there remained the march before the bodies. The crowd was scattering, disappointed. There had been much ceremony, much talking, according to general opinion, for very little fun. Shooting could not compare as a spectacle with beheading . . .

The soldiers had relaxed their watchfulness; curious hillmen were breaking through, trying to get near the corpses. So that when a man in a brown cloak walked toward the officers of the Legion company, he was not noticed until he spoke.

"I'm late, Captain—they wouldn't let me pass."

Sorval turned his head slowly, then started. His jaws sagged, his mouth opened. Clerc saw him tremble convulsively. In a moment, he understood, and was far from calm himself. The man in the brown cloak, despite beard and garments, was Legionnaire Corbu.

"What do you want?" Sorval asked, stupidly.

"Come on, Captain, use your head," Corbu pleaded humorously. "I don't want anything. But you need me to complete the ceremony. Or am I wrong once more?"

"You're crazy!"

"Not for long, Captain."

"All right, you're under arrest. I'll send you to Meknes."

"I'm sentenced already," Corbu insisted. He grinned. *"Ca vous en bouche un coin, tout de même, mon Capitaine?"*

This was the clue to his motive. He was right; Sorval, this time, was undeniably astonished, at a loss for words. Here was something he had never seen and had never heard of—a man reporting for his own execution.

It was Vignetti who recovered first, and gave the necessary orders. The show was not as orderly as the first performance —the riders shoved back the bulk of the crowd casually, the firing squad made ready rapidly. Captain Sorval did not speak again. His jaws were once again clenched tight, the grimace of amazement was gone. But the flesh of his cheeks quivered still.

"May I give you a word of advice, Captain?" Corbu asked, before following the sergeant.

Sorval nodded.

"I'd take a good, stiff brandy when I get home, if I were you. You appear to have caught a chill, Captain."

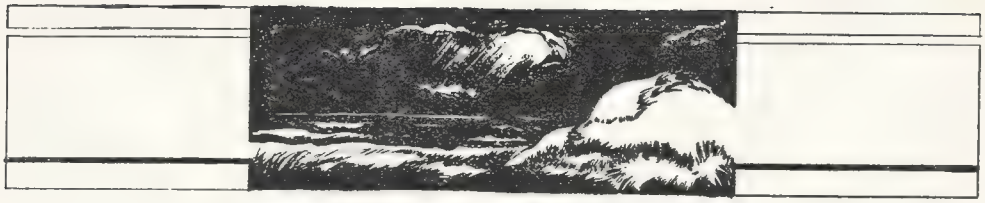
Then he nodded farewell to Vignetti and Clerc. His last moments were happy. He dominated the scene; he was the center of attention. The others who had preceded him had been sheep led to the slaughter. He was a man.

"About here?" he asked, standing between the posts. "All right! No, don't bother with that scarf. I am not cold, and I don't want to cry. So long, Sergeant."

He waved his hand at his acquaintances in the ranks, composed himself, struck an attitude. The sergeant lifted his hand, the rifles rose.

"Vive la Légion!"

Detonations punctuated Corbu's last words.



A CAPE STORM

By HARRY KEMP

THE gulls shift, balanced high on riding wings.
Not only my rhyme, my lifted being sings!
Shielded from strident sand, my eyeballs reach
Across the seething, furious, blanched dominion
Of waves and foam, and breakers bellowing in.
Where the sea's lips of fury flange out, thin,
One shore-bird scutters with a broken pinion,
Astonished, here and there, about the beach.

The purple-blackish sky's all written by
The pallid-branching lightnings as they ply
Celestial script of their robust delight!

I wish that God had never let me write,
Because there's music here and music there
And my small pen can not transcribe its air! . . .

I seek the song I've never overtaken;
I face the power I can not reawaken
In words, though this wild day the storm has given
The beauty of all music, lightning riven.
That struggling fisher-boat perceives the glory,
Yet I stand here and can not tell the story.

It is a song that only you can sing
(Though I am sorry for that shore-bird's wing),
O, Storm, that like the heightening play of life,
No poet ever yet has put in song:
I lift my prayer up to the gods of strife
To strike against my sleep their pulsing gong!

A Railroad Story

BROWNIES

By

E S. DELLINGER

BENTLY R. BRUTON was a freight engineer on the K G & O. By nature he was as restless under rule and restraint as an untamed bronco under the rope. Consequently, when H. M. Stanley Bright came down to Laskogee as division superintendent and installed the Brown System of discipline among the men, it had been inevitable that Bent Bruton should be the first man to try out the new boss and taste discipline under the new régime.

Under this system, devised by George R. Brown of the Fall Brook Line, when a full grown, double fisted, hard boiled railroader forgets his rule book or becomes obsessed with the mistaken notion that he owns the road, the super, instead of discharging him, calls him into the office, bawls him out like a truant schoolboy, assesses his service record with demerit marks, and lets him go on working.

These demerit marks are "brownies". Of course, there is a limit to the number a man can have against his service record and still hold his job. On the K G & O, sixty brownies was tonnage. If a man coupled into sixty of them between January 1st and December 31st of any year, the office handed him his last pay check and a service letter, and he left town. Sixty brownies in a year, and that meant the end of the job.

H. M. Stanley Bright took the Brown System seriously. In fact, H. M. Stanley Bright took all things seriously. Bently R. Bruton took it as a huge joke. Within three weeks after it was installed, he had been into the office four times and had

signed for fifty-five brownies, thereby earning the title, which, renewed from year to year, clung to him like the mole on his right cheek. So that by the time of the smash at Turley, every one on the Oklahoma except the timekeeper and the little blonde in the super's office actually thought the B in his name was for Brownies instead of Bently.

It was a morning in January. The terminal town of Laskogee lay floating in a sea of white fog out of which came the asthmatic *whoosh—whoosh—whoosh* of switch engines and the deadened rattle of bumping frieght cars. Brownies Bruton sauntered up Railroad Avenue and turned right toward the terminal offices.

His shoulders were slightly stooped. In his blue eyes lurked a mischievous twinkle. On his handsome, bronzed face was a lazy smile which had not been wiped off since the bald headed, country-school teacher down at Mountain Grove, Missouri, had slapped both sides of it at once for feeding apple cores to the pigs through a knothole in the schoolhouse floor.

This morning he was dressed for the field—high laced boots, moleskin hunting breeches, corduroy coat, and corduroy cap with flaps tied above the head with silk tape. The pockets of his coat sagged from the weight of shotgun shells, and he carried under his right arm a shining pumpgun, muzzle downward.

With an air of easy self-assurance, he entered the office building, hung coat and cap over the muzzle of his gun and set it in the corner. Then he mounted the stairs and passed unhurriedly down the corridor to the frosted glass door marked in gilt letters, Division Superintendent.

Superintendent Bright was busy at the long oak table. He did not look up. Brownies paused in the doorway. The devilish light in his blue eyes deepened. The lazy smile quickened.

"Good mornin', Mr. Bright," he greeted in his smoothest tone.

The official looked up quickly.

"Oh, good morning, Bruton. Here with your usual promptness, I see."

There was a tinge of irony in the official tone. Brownies detected it at once.

"Yes, sir. Here on the dot."

He lighted a cigaret and, seating himself at the table, leaned on his right elbow. The official puffed thoughtfully on a half smoked cigar. The little blonde brought a sheaf of papers from the files. She winked slyly at Brownies as she handed them to Mr. Bright. Brownies blew a ring of smoke into the air and, smiling easily through it, watched the super thumb through the papers.

BRIGHT was dressed in a gray suit which exactly matched the gray at his temples. His blue eyes, cold as blue ice, glanced out from behind horn rimmed spectacles. A closely cropped mustache overhung his firm mouth.

"Bruton," he said at last, "when do you expect to grow up?"

"Sir?"

Brownies glanced quickly at his boss. Bright laid down the cigar and tossed the papers into the desk tray.

"I said when do you expect to grow up! You've been working for the K G & O eleven years. You're twenty-eight years old. You've been acting like a fool kid ever since I've been on the job. Seems to me it's about time you cut out some of this infernal monkey business."

"Yeah?" drawled Brownies. "What's the matter now?"

"You know very well what's the matter. You were called last night to take out a hot-shot stock train. Caller spent a half hour hunting you; and when he found you, you laid off on call. Result? Twenty minutes delay calling another engineer."

Twenty minutes delay! Brownies knew enough about railroading to know that twenty minutes delay to short time stock would demand an explanation from the super to the men higher up. He was sorry, for while he had tormented and teased because of his contempt for the Brown System, secretly he had admired

almost to the point of adoration this grizzled prince whom he had nicknamed "His Majesty". He had not thought of causing more than a bit of annoyance.

"You see, Mr. Bright," he said contritely, "this is the last day of duck season, an'—"

"Duck season, hell!" exploded the official. "You know the rules of this job. If you don't want to work, you notify the caller before he comes after you. If he calls you, you go! Get me?"

Bright slipped a sheet of manila paper from the clip in the desk tray and flipped it across the table.

"Here—sign for these demerits. And from here on, you conduct yourself like a railroad man instead of a kid."

Brownies took the sheet of paper and read its contents twice.

Mr Bently A Bruton,
Engr Oklahoma Div.
Dear Sir:

You are hereby informed that your service record has been assessed with forty-five demerits, acc't delaying Tr. Exa 4731 by refusing call on Jan 15th. Please sign and return to this office immediately.

Very truly yours,
—H. M. STANLEY BRIGHT
Div Supt

The smile almost faded from Brownies' face. He stared hard at the letter. Out in the train yard, the four switch engines panted and wheezed; the box cars rattled and banged.

"Don't you think you're givin' me a kinda—kinda heavy load for refusin' a call, Mr. Bright?" he faltered. "I believe you handed me ten the last time—"

"Listen to me, Bruton—" The official laid down his cigar and pointed a finger at the engineer. "In checking through your record, I find that for nine years in a line you have apparently tried to see how quickly you could get your service envelop full of demerit marks. Apparently you are proud of them—want to live up to your record and your name."

"Why, Mr. Bright—"

The super lifted his hand.

"For nine straight years, you've had fifty-five demerit marks by the twentieth of January; and not a one of them for a mistake in railroading. Here are some of your offenses: Using whistle to flirt with farm women along the line; letting people ride the engine with you; delaying trains by laying off on call; stopping train at farmhouse to get a glass of buttermilk . . . "

Brownies smiled. That was the time he had come nearest being fired. The super was still speaking.

"I notice also that you have not gotten one single demerit mark after you had fifty-five. Not one! Now I'm done fooling with you. If you can railroad eleven and a half months of the year without getting into this office, you can railroad the other half or you can quit. I'm giving you your tonnage."

"But suppose—"

"I'm not supposing, Bruton. I've warned you before. If you slop over now, the Lord have mercy on you. I won't. You've got enough brownies out of this deal to last you till December 31st. Now go on duck hunting."

At 2:30 that afternoon Brownies returned to Laskogee with a dozen fat mallards and three Canadian geese. As he did every time he came in from a duck hunt with a full bag, he took a pair of mallards down to Mrs. Bright.

That was Thursday. It snowed during the night. Friday the sun shone until noon. In the afternoon the sky became overcast and a fog came up out of the east so dense that by nightfall the street lights were invisible a block away.

BROWNIES was called for 7:30 on a drag east. He drew for the trip one of the big new mikado freight hogs, with steam stoker, air grate shaker, air reverse and all the trimmings.

At 9:30 he took siding at Galton, thirty miles east of Laskogee, to meet No. 9 and let No. 8 by him. As soon as his train had cleared the main track, he swung into the gangway, shoved his goggles over the vizor of his striped cloth

cap and lighted a cigaret. The fireman kicked the fire box door shut and faced him.

"What did the Old Man say about you layin' out that stock train night before last?" he inquired.

"Handed me forty-five brownies and a hot lecture."

"Forty-five!" echoed the fireman.

"The pop-off was sure spoutin'."

"You better watch your step, big boy, or there'll be a hoghead huntin' a job."

Brownies stuffed a piece of clean waste into his pocket. Then with wrench, torch, hammer and oilcan, he swung down to the ground to oil around.

While he was twisting in grease plugs on the main pins, a light, coming from the direction of the station, shone dimly through the fog. Brownies thought nothing of it. Assuming it to be one of the trainmen returning from the inspection of his train, he did not even turn his head when the steps crunched on the cinders and two figures came to a halt behind him.

"That you, Bruton?"

The voice carried a note of uneasiness, as if the speaker feared he might be overheard. Brownies set his oilcan on a side rod and faced about.

"Hello, Norris," he said, recognizing the old second trick operator at Galton.

Brownies turned from the operator to his companion, perceived that the latter was a young woman dressed in hiking boots, khaki breeches, green sweater and green tam. He wondered if she might be a student operator whom Norris was breaking in.

"Pardon me," apologized the old operator. "Miss Hastings, this is Mr. Bruton."

Brownies doffed the striped cap. Miss Hastings murmured a formality. Brownies glanced curiously from her to the operator. She tucked a ringlet of hair back under the green tam, buttoned the top button of the green sweater. Norris was speaking again.

"Miss Hastings teaches science in our high school, Brownies," he explained hurriedly. "She rooms over at my place. She's been rarin' to ride one of these new mikes ever since she's been in Galton—she wants to see how it works."

Brownies slapped an overalled thigh with his gauntlets. He liked girls, especially red haired ones who wore green. He had often let lady friends ride the cab with him. This, he knew, was why Norris had asked the favor of him tonight. He hesitated.

"I thought you might be willin' to let her ride over to Turley with you, Brownies," Norris said at last. "What about it?"

Brownies imaged H. M. Stanley Bright sitting behind the oak table fingering an envelop with fifty-five demerit marks on it. He heard a determined voice: "I'm giving you full tonnage—enough to last you till December. If you slop over now—"

No. 8 shot by, horn whistle screaming, sparks shooting skyward from the short stack. Brownies turned to look into a pair of blue eyes sparkling with excitement and anticipation.

"I dunno, Miss Hastings," he protested weakly. "Ridin' these freight hogs is a dangerous occupation. One minute you're in the cab ridin' the iron fifty miles an hour; next you're upside down in the ditch scaldin' to death in a wreck—"

"How many wrecks have you scalded to death in, Mr. Bruton?" she asked sweetly.

"Why—uh—why—"

The old operator began to laugh. Brownies joined in. Miss Hastings thrust her hands saucily into the sweater pockets.

"Listen," she urged. "I'm not afraid. I've ridden airplanes upside down. I've ridden broncs and Texas steers—"

"Aw, come on, hogger," said Norris. "Let the girl go. She's crazy to ride a freight hog. She's promised never to tell on you. She can ride over to Turley with you and neither Bright nor anybody else'll ever know it. Be a sport. Let 'er go."

It was thus that Brownies Bruton, in violation of Rule No. 565 for engineers, was persuaded to let Miss Hastings ride the cab to Turley.

THE evening passed quickly. He let her sit in the cab seat, hand on throttle, peering ahead along the track as they thundered through the night. In explaining to her how he made the half million pound mass of quivering steel drag six million pounds of freight over the hills and flats of Oklahoma, he soon forgot all about H. M. Stanley Bright and the service envelop with fifty-five brownies on it.

About midnight, he stopped for water at Blue River tank, an hour's run from Turley. Miss Hastings climbed back over the coal, watched the fireman pull down the huge spout and fill the twelve thousand gallon tank with water. Brownies oiled around. The brakeman looked over his train and returned to the head end.

The night had grown colder. The fog had given place to mist, and the mist to snow. Heavy flakes, thicker now than the fog had been before, filled the atmosphere. On leaving the tank, Brownies again took the throttle and let the girl sit on the seat behind him.

He thundered down the slight grade, following the windings of Blue River. At Leeds, halfway between the tank and Turley, he had a meeting point with a westbound extra. He approached the station under control, expecting to find the train in siding. It was not there. The brakeman stood in the gangway, lantern in hand, watching ahead.

As they approached the telegraph office, a red light gleamed through the snow. Beneath it on the ground, the operator stood holding up a white light in one hand, an order hoop in the other. The brakeman swooped down, grabbed the hoop as the engine shot by. Then he climbed back into the deck and handed Brownies the neatly folded sheet of green tissues.

Brownies unfolded the order.

Exa 1427 east meet exa 1289 west at Turley instead of at Leeds. Exa 1427 take siding at Turley.

He reached for the cord, sounded two keen blasts of his whistle; and in almost the same moment, dropped the reverse toward the corner and opened the throttle. The crash of the exhaust deepened.

Brownies then showed his passenger the order, explained how train movement is directed from the dispatcher's office through orders delivered by operators to train crews.

"But don't you men ever make mistakes?" the girl inquired. "Don't you ever forget?"

"Oh, yes. We often forget. Sometimes the dispatcher issues a 'lap' order—that is, an order instructing two trains to use the same track at the same time. Sometimes the operator fails to give a crew the right orders. Sometimes the train crew forget an order which they have received."

"What happens when you forget?"

Brownies shrugged, laughed back over his shoulder.

"Sister, when that happens, there's usually a couple of engines and a string of box cars piled up in some cornfield till the big hook comes out and separates them; and usually there's a hoghead or two joins the angels."

Miss Hastings began humming a snatch of song. Brownies hooked his reverse up a couple of notches and sat watching the headlight plow its conical lane through the curtain of falling snow. Within a few minutes they would arrive at Turley. She would leave the engine. He would take his train on into Grand River. He wondered if he would see her again. He was still wondering when he sounded the whistle for the crossing a mile west of Turley. He heard an answering blast. He thought it was the echo of his own whistle . . .

On the K G & O, the Gould system of delivering orders was still in vogue. Under Gould rules, the normal position of the order signal was "clear—green", unless the station had orders for a passing

train. If there were orders to be delivered, the signal was set at "stop—red", when the order was copied.

On most other roads, the standard system was used. Under standard rules, the normal position of the signal is red, the signal being cleared only during the passage of a train for which the station has no orders.

Shortly before this time, the dispatcher had hired an operator who had been trained on the Santa Fé. The new man was working Turley tonight. From force of habit, he changed the position of his signal when he had no orders for a train, left it set as it was when he had orders.

About the time Brownies whistled for the crossing there came a cry of consternation in the dispatcher's office in Laskogee.

"What's wrong?" called the chief from an adjoining room.

"We've sure played hell over here on the river."

"That so? How come?"

The chief came hurrying into the office. The dispatcher was at the table.

"We've got them two extras together down around Turley."

"How did you do it?"

"I had 'em meetin' at Leeds. The 1289 fell down, and I changed the meet to Turley—put out the order to the 1289 at Turley. That Santa Fé kid's workin' at Turley tonight. He forgot to put out his board and let the 1289 get by without the order."

"Is the 1427 through Leeds?"

"Yeah. He's almost over to Turley. They'll hit—let me see: they'll hit about that crossin' a mile west of Turley. Boy, that's goin' to be a dirty smash!"

The chief stood looking down at the order in the book.

"Is it snowing at Turley tonight?" he inquired.

"Yeah. Been snowin' there for an hour. No way on earth to keep 'em apart so far as I can see."

The west end man came into the room. The three of them stood in silence for a full minute, then the chief spoke again.

"Well, you might as well order out the wrecker. Have 'em ready to go. They'll be needed and needed bad."

MISS HASTINGS was still humming her song. Brownies was peering ahead along the track. The white milepost for Turley, plastered with snow, swam by. He shoved up the throttle to let his train drift down toward the switch. Then he moved his hand to the whistle cord.

He did not grasp it. Before him, a light burst suddenly out of the blinding storm. With a startled cry, he leaped to his feet, gripped the brake valve and shoved it on the big hole. But before its power was felt on spinning drivers, the two trains were together. With a jar which shook the earth and sent the box cars reeling end over end into the ditch, three thousand tons of export wheat headed for the Gulf rammed three thousand tons of lumber, headed for the prairies.

Within the cab were terror and confusion. As the engines came together, the brakeman leaped from the cab window. The fireman stumbled toward the gangway, pitched headlong into the deck and never moved.

Miss Hastings would have fallen there to die with him, had not Brownies, as he was hurled forward into the corner of his cab, grasped her and dragged her out of the death trap beneath the firedoor.

The 1427 did not turn over. She stood till and quivered. The smaller engine drove in her smoke box, crawled into it like a scared rabbit into a hollow log. Clouds of stifling steam came out from broken pipes and enveloped them. Cars of wheat and lumber rolled and squeezed and jostled. The tender was rammed forward, crushing the cab frame in to trap the two of them; and a car of wheat on top of the pile burst open, pouring its creeping volume down in the wreckage.

Brownies' head striking against the corner of the cab, he crumpled in an

unconscious heap in a corner. Miss Hastings, protected by his body, was only slightly stunned. She soon recovered her senses and managed to hold his head above the mass of wheat to prevent his smothering until the rescue party came out from Turley.

She was still with him when they arrived. In the excitement and confusion, neither she nor any of the crew who knew she had been in the cab thought for a moment of trying to cover up the fact that she had been on the engine with him. The papers got hold of it, played it up as a choice bit of scandal. The school board at Galton dismissed her the following day without a hearing; and every one who knew the circumstances guessed that Brownies Bruton had made his last trip on the K G & O.

In fact, no one expected it with any more certainty than Brownies himself. During the month he was in the hospital waiting for a broken arm and a wrenched back and a ten-stitch gash in the side of his head to heal, he did some serious thinking. That month wrought in his character such changes as the years had failed to bring about.

When he came to the office two days after his release, called there by order of H. M. Stanley Bright to face an investigation, his air of easy assurance was gone. His smile was faked. He did not bring representatives from the Brotherhood. He came alone.

H. M. Stanley Bright indicated a seat at the table. The little blonde brought out the service record and the sheaf of papers. She did not smile. Bright chewed the butt of his cigar. Brownies' face was pale. Bright tossed the papers into the desk tray.

"The inevitable has happened, Bruton," he snapped.

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose that now, since you've come damn near getting a woman killed trying to turn a freight hog into a passenger coach, you can savvy why we have rule No. 565 in the book?"

The official eyebrow lifted. Brownies said nothing.

"I want to know why you were carrying that girl on the engine, Bruton."

Brownies considered carefully. To explain would involve Norris. Norris had a wife and three children. Norris needed his job.

"Did—did Miss Hastings make a statement?" he parried.

"No," said the super. "Sulked—refused to talk—except to inform me it was none of my darned business."

"Good sport, that girl is," murmured Brownies.

"Yeah. Almost as big a fool as you are, Bruton."

Bright threw the cigar in the cuspidor. Brownies stared through the window at a switch engine on the turntable. While he was trying to decide what statement he should make, Bright spoke again.

"Do you recall the last time you were in this office, Bruton?"

"January 16th, I believe."

"You recall that I warned you then to cut out this infernal monkey business and railroad by the book?"

Brownies nodded, lighted a cigaret.

"Then will you please explain why, the very next trip out, in open defiance of me, the rule book, and every other symbol of authority, you did the very thing you had been warned not to do? Were you deliberately trying to get yourself fired?"

Brownies opened his mouth, closed it. He knew that nothing he could say would save his own job. A statement might involve Norris. A slip of a girl had taken her medicine in silence. He would do likewise. He shrugged his stooped shoulders. Bright shoved back his chair.

"You can get your check and service letter today, Bruton. They are made out ready for you to sign."

He thrust a hand across the table. Brownies stared at it for a full minute, clasped it in his own huge paw.

"I'm sorry, Bruton," the super said.

He turned quickly and strode over to

the window. Brownies sauntered through the door, down the long corridor, and out into the cheerless street thick with Oklahoma slush.

BROWNIES recovered from his injuries. Unable to secure a job elsewhere during the Spring and Summer, he remained in Laskogee. The Brotherhood took up his case, trying to secure his reinstatement. Committees visited the office, extolling the virtues of their erring brother, appealing for sympathy, protesting that his discharge was unfair and unjust.

"You might as well save your breath, gentlemen," the official told the last committee. "I have been division superintendent thirty years. I have never yet reinstated a man I had fired for cause. I certainly had plenty of cause to fire Bruton. He got what was coming to him. Let it be a lesson to the rest of you. I will not reinstate him."

In August, despairing of ever getting back on the K G & O, Brownies took a job firing for the M & A. This road was a rival of the K G & O. It came in from the northeast, crossed the K G & O at Turley and paralleled it for twenty miles to Blue River tank. From this point, it rambled up Blue River, following the windings of the stream to Laskogee.

As a railroad, the M & A was the joke of the Southwest. Its engines were ready for back shop or junk pile. Its cars were rickety, leaky and unpainted. Its tracks, laid on rotten ties and dirt ballast, were not fit for a handcar. It averaged two wrecks a week.

When Brownies first took the job, he thought of it merely as a humiliation, as a plunge downward. But before he had gone twice over the division, he realized that the change meant more than reduction. It meant ruin.

The M & A scrap heaps were all hand fired. Hand firing requires a strong back and a pair of strong arms. Brownies' arm had come from the cast crooked. The spinal injury, which had at first seemed negligible, gave him constant pain, which forced him into frequent periods of idleness. He knew that he would never be able to swing a scoop in the steel deck during the ten years which it would require him again to work his way to a throttle.

During one of his frequent periods of idleness he met Miss Hastings, who had spent the Summer abroad. The change which had come over him must have struck her with peculiar force—the drawn face, the graying temples, the dull hopeless cast in the eyes which a few months before had twinkled with boyish mischief.

She went to Galton the next day, and on the second returned to Laskogee, bringing Norris with her. They went together to the terminal office. They explained in detail how they had persuaded Brownies to let her ride the engine with him to Turley that night, told of his reluctance to permit her to go, tried to take the blame for the violation, and urged the official to let the engineer return to work.

But their efforts were as unavailing as those of the Brotherhood had been. Bright listened unmoved to their recital, to their appeal.

"Is that all?" he asked when they had finished. "Then let me tell you that your explanation does not alter matters in the least—except that you, Norris, as an employee of this company, will be disciplined for urging this violation of rules. As for Bruton, I am sorry. If it had been his first offense, he would probably have gotten by with a few demerits. The Brown System would have saved his job. But it was not his first. He had scoffed at the Brown System from the time it was installed, had seemed to think it was put in as a piece of child's play. He will have to suffer the consequences. I shall not reinstate him."

That was the 20th of September. Brownies had deadheaded east that morning. He was called out of Mound View firing for Bill Flinn on a merchandise run to Laskogee at 10:50 P.M. About 10:20 he went down to the crew room

and changed into his work clothes. Flinn came in.

Flinn was a big man with coarse red hair, and blue eyes set in red rimmed sockets. He had been fired off the K G & O eight years ago for breaking Rule G—the liquor rule. Brownies had known him then, had never liked him. He walked a crooked path from the door to his locker, fumbled with the locker key.

"Goin' out with me tonight, Brownies?" he asked thickly.

"Yeah," returned the fireman. "Reckon I'll have to."

The engineer slipped a bottle of whisky out of his pocket and uncorked it.

"Have a snort?" He offered the bottle to Brownies.

"Nope. Don't drink."

Flinn laughed coarsely, dropped the bottle into his grip.

"B'lieve old Bright fired *you* f'r carryin' a dame on the engine with you." Brownies' face reddened.

"It's a damn cinch he didn't fire me for Rule G," he growled.

HE SLUNG his scoop over his shoulder and went alone to hunt up the engine. Flinn came down a few minutes later and made a pretense of oiling. About 10:45 he backed out to the train. When he coupled on he hit the cars with a jolt which rattled the bell, jarred the tool kit off into the deck and slammed Brownies up against the boiler. Then he took a hammer and commenced tapping at the brake valve.

"What's wrong with it, Bill?" asked Brownies, crossing the deck.

"Aw, I dunno—on the blink. Nothin' ever right on this lousy pike."

"If that brake valve's not workin', you'd better stay right here till it's fixed," advised Brownies.

"Aw, dry up," snapped Flinn. "I'm runnin' this hog t'night. You're firin'."

Brownies returned to his own side of the cab, stared out at the green and yellow and red lights gleaming through the September haze.

Soon Frank George, the conductor, came out with the orders. He had heard the bang with which Flinn had let the engine come back into the train.

"You want to be careful how you handle this outfit tonight, Flinn," he warned. "We're pullin' enough dynamite an' blastin' powder to blow us all to the planet Mars."

"Aw, go t' hell," snarled Flinn. " 'F you don't like the way I handle a engine, git off an' walk."

"If you keep drinkin' that squirrel soup," drawled the conductor, "we'll all be walkin' before daylight—or else ridin' a hearse."

George swung down to the cinders and loafed back toward the caboose. Brownies did not give another thought to dynamite or blasting powder—not then. In fact, even if he had not suspected that the old conductor was merely bluffing in order to make Flinn handle the train more carefully, he would have been too busy to think much about the load they were hauling or to care particularly if their dynamite took a sudden notion to start both him and the rolling stock skyward.

The No. 810 was an old consolidation engine. She had no coal pusher, air door, or air grate shaker. Brownies scooped down his own coal, swung the door with his hand every time he tossed in a scoop of coal, and coaxed the brakeman into helping him shake the grates when they had to be shaken.

To make matters worse, Flinn sat in the cab alternately swearing and drinking. When he started the engine, he put his reverse in the corner, widened his throttle, forgot his sand and blew all the fire off the back grates into the front end of the fire box. When his engine hogged down on the hills he cursed because there was no steam; when he ran by a switch he swore the brake valve was not working. Finally, becoming alarmed, Brownies inspected the valve, found it in working order. The trouble was with the engineer. Flinn was drunk and still hitting the bottle.

Until far past midnight they stumbled along without mishap. On leaving Walton, eighteen miles from Turley, where they had stopped about 3:20 A.M for coal and water, the brakeman took his place beside the boiler head and lighted a cigaret. Brownies went down into the deck working with his fire. Flinn got the old No. 810 rolling along thirty miles an hour down the slight grade, making a run for Stillwell Hill. He closed the throttle, let the slack bunch in the train; then as he ran through the sag at the foot of the grade, suddenly jerked the throttle wide.

The roar of the exhaust boomed on the night. As Brownies reeled back to his platform the roar ceased. The engine slowed as if some giant hand had gripped it.

"What the—" exclaimed the brakeman, struggling to his feet and looking across at Flinn.

"Damn fool took the slack out of 'em and lunged one, I reckon," growled Brownies.

He turned on the blower to keep the smoke from backing out into the cab. The two of them watched the air gage. The hand went steadily back to zero—air all gone from the train line.

"Either lunged one or put 'em in the ditch," sighed the brakeman.

He swung down to the ground and trotted back through the weeds. Brownies banked the fire, returned to the window to smoke and watch the lights playing along the train. Presently the brakeman returned.

"What's wrong?" asked Brownies.

"Aw, we got a drawbar down here about ten car lengths," replied the brakeman.

He climbed the tank and rolled off the heavy chain. It went into the weeds with a ring and rattle. Brownies lighted a torch and, climbing down to the ground, helped him drag the chain back along the train.

Nine cars from the engine they came upon the break. The whole front end of an old M & A box car was torn out. The draft rigging was twisted and piled under the front set of trucks, and mixed with it were boxes of salmon and tomatoes burst wide open. Dropping the chain between the rails, they stood looking down at the wreckage. Conductor George came sauntering up from the rear, squirted a mouthful of tobacco juice upon the broken rigging and drawled out—

"Damn lucky for a bunch of us M & A slaves that this wasn't the next car back."

"Yeah? Why so?"

"Go take a look."

The three men strode back to the car behind the "bad order". Tacked on the side door was a placard upon which was a ghoulish figure with skeleton eyes and hands, and robes of flame. Above the figure was the one word, Explosives; and beneath it, Keep Lights and Fires Away.

"Dynamite for the mines at Wellington," explained the conductor. "Four more cars of it scattered along between here an' the crummy."

Three men, returning to the scene of the accident, stood looking down at the chain, at the broken rigging, at the scrambled mess of salmon and tomatoes. Old George bit off a chew of tobacco and shoved the plug back into his pocket. Then he turned to the brakeman and said:

"Well, sonny, you might as well go over to the engine an' git you a red one, an' go over to Stillwell an' stop 8. Shorty's gone back to Walton to flag 5. We jist got two more drawbars out between here an' the crummy. Bakehead an' me'll chain 'em up an' fetch 'em in a piece at a time."

The brakeman hurried away toward the engine. George and Brownies set to work, chaining up bad order cars to drag into Stillwell.

BEFORE they had got their first cut into the house track, H. M. Stanley Bright, over on the K G & O, had his private car coupled on the Gulf Coast Limited and headed east toward New Orleans. In the private car, Bright retired imme-

diately, but he did not sleep. The clicking of wheels on joints kept him awake. And while he tossed, he kept thinking of Brownies Bruton and the girl who had been in the office that morning interceding for him. He had liked Brownies. Every one had, for that matter. He almost wished he had an excuse for reinstating him. But H. M. Stanley Bright was a man who never let personal likes interfere with discipline. Discipline must be maintained!

At 7:45 the Gulf Coast Limited made its regular stop at Turley. Turley being the junction point with the Kansas City branch, the Limited regularly picked up here two cars for New Orleans, an express directly behind the engine and a Pullman on the rear.

In getting these cars, the locomotive cut off from the Limited and backed into the house track for the express car, while the Turley switch engine threw the Pullman on behind. This morning, the switcher coupled into H. M. Stanley Bright's car and backed up the main track with it so as to cut in the Pullman ahead, as required by rules.

Bright, having arisen early, was standing on the forward platform, watching the receding rails as the engine backed away. The rock ballast was tamped neatly between the solid oak ties. The heavy rails, lined perfectly, glistened in the rising sun. His Majesty puffed a black cigar, and a smile of prideful satisfaction came into his blue eyes.

But the smile was a brief one. From the well kept tracks of his own beloved K G & O, his eyes wandered to the slovenly steel of the M & A, thirty feet to the north. The rails were kinked and rusty. The ties were rotten and uneven. The boards on the street crossing were warped and frayed.

The K G & O superintendent clamped his teeth on the cigar butt. The tracks of the M & A made him think of Brownies Bruton. For a fleeting instant he caught a vision of the drawn, tired face which the engineer had worn that last day in the office.

"Damn fool!" he mumbled. "Got what was coming to him. I must be getting soft headed to let it worry me."

The grizzled official shrugged his shoulders, turned to watch the shining engine of the Limited glide away from its train and disappear in the house track.

His switch engine stopped. A yard man turned the switch for the spur track and signaled "ahead". The car moved forward to couple into the rear of the Pullman. Bright turned to reenter the car. With his hand on the door knob, he paused to listen. The shrill blast of an old M & A engine sounded a crossing warning. He looked back. An M & A freight train swung in from the northeast and came pounding alongside the K G & O Limited.

As it rattled toward the crossing, a truck—a gasoline truck—roared up from the south to the street crossing behind the standing Limited. It was running rapidly. Its driver could not see the approaching M & A freight train. Bright turned loose the knob, dropped his cigar to the platform, leaned forward, tense, expectant. An instant before the truck darted out from behind the Limited and headed toward the M & A tracks, he uttered a cry, leaped from the platform and, waving his arms in frantic stop sign, hit the ground running toward the crossing.

On the M & A freight, Brownies Bruton was in the left cab window watching. He saw the K G & O Limited standing on the main track with the engine cut off. Having fired the Limited for two years before his promotion, he knew exactly what they were doing, could picture every movement in detail. He wiped his sooty face with a bandanna and sighed wearily. If only he were on that train this morning!

Then he saw the private car with H. M. Stanley Bright on the platform. The car was heading into the spur. Brownies could see every movement of the gray clad figure. His lips drew down in a tighter line. A hard gleam came for a moment into his tired eyes. He

tugged at the bell cord. The gleam disappeared.

On the right side, Bill Flinn, groggy from his night at the bottle, pulled on the whistle cord and swore thickly. Brownies' lips curled in cold contempt. He looked once more from the window. When his engine was two car lengths from the crossing, he saw H. M. Stanley Bright leap from the platform of the private car, waving.

"Stop 'em, Bill! Stop 'em!" he yelled across at Flinn.

Before the words were spoken, he saw the truck dart out from behind the Limited; saw the driver slam on his brakes and leap from the cab; saw the truck nose up on the crossing directly in front of him.

The brakeman darted toward the left gangway. With a yell, Flinn leaped to his feet, made one drunken swipe at the brake valve, and dived into the deck toward the gangway on the right. Brownies jerked the cab window shut and crouched on the fireman's platform waiting.

The nose of the old No. 810 plowed into the tank truck. Brownies felt the engine quiver. There came an explosive flash—and burning gasoline leaped skyward to shower down upon the old M & A scrap heap, leaving it a mass of flame.

As the burning liquid shot back along the flashing side rods, Flinn jumped from the cab. Brownies whirled off the seat and stumbled toward the left gangway, intending to follow suit.

IN THE deck, he paused. Spurts of flame were darting in at the right cab window which Flinn had not taken time to close. Hot tongues were licking at him through gangways right and left. He heard the hiss of escaping air, as the partially open brake valve drained it slowly off.

While he hesitated, images surged through his brain—the K G & O Limited on the track to the south, engine cut off, passengers asleep in Pullmans—placards on cars of high explosive . . .

A single spark in a bit of powder trickling from a leaky container would blow his own train and the K G & O Limited to atoms, would wipe the town of Turley from the map.

Air brakes had taken hold. The train was slowing. Unless those brakes were released, it must surely stop. Its continued movement was measured in seconds. Fire was shooting up the sidewalls of the cars as they dragged through. A powder car might stop in its midst!

Brownies stepped toward the gangway. Seconds were precious. To save himself he must jump—jump and run. Then above the swish of the fire he heard the crash of the exhaust, working against the setting brakes. Flinn had left the throttle open! Flinn had jumped. Flinn should have remained at his post. Was not that the unwritten rule of the rail?

But what did Flinn care for rules written or unwritten? Across the field of consciousness flashed a vision of the old sot, slumped in his cab seat, drunk. Brownies wavered. Flinn had been engineer; he had been fireman. Flinn was gone. Unless some one remained in that cab, there was bound to be disaster . . .

Brownies turned from the gangway, leaped to the right side, groped for the brake valve and whipped it to full release, turning air from the reservoir into train line to release the brakes which but a moment ago Flinn had set in jumping. Soon they were off. Wheels were running free. At ten miles an hour, he was dragging the long freight through the danger zone.

He dropped the reverse down the quadrant, widened the throttle, worked the sand valve. At every crash of the exhaust, he cowered lower, fearing it might be the beginning of an earth rocking blast which must surely come once fire found its way into the cars of powder.

On and on he dragged, fighting fumes of burning gas, the sting and quiver of scorching flesh. The film of gasoline burned off the metal. Fire persisted only in pools on running board and pilot.

Flame no longer whipped in at open windows. But on his own person, denim jumper and overalls, igniting, sent stinking waves of heat sweeping over his tortured body. He tore them off, hurled them from the cab. Then he cowered half-clad in the reeking deck.

At last, as in the clutch of nightmare, he thrust his head from the cab window, tried to look about him. His vision was blurred; his senses were reeling. Mastering his reason for a moment, he realized where he was, knew that he had dragged his train far past the crossing. He reached for the throttle, shoved over the brake valve. The train squealed to a stop.

Brownies turned his scorched face toward the rear. His lashes were singed, his eyelids bleeding. He saw that the two head cars of his train were on fire. He knew that somehow he must get those cars away from the others. Nine cars deep was the first load of powder.

He stumbled to his feet, drove himself through the deck and half fell, half climbed down to the weed grown right-of-way. He moved back, intending to cut the train, return to his cab, and drag the burning cars away from the others before the flames spread.

He staggered back to the second car, lifted the coupler, turned the anglecock in the train line. Fire whipped into his blistered face. He staggered out from between the cars.

The K G & O switcher clattered up its track thirty feet to the south of him. It ground to a stop. H. M. Stanley Bright and the crew came running toward him. He turned toward them and mumbled thickly:

"Git 'em 'way, fellows! Git 'em 'way—quick—dynamite. Nine cars—five cars dynamite!"

He motioned toward his own engine. The engineer of the switcher understood. He leaped into the half demolished cab of the M & A engine and quickly snatched the burning cars far up the track.

Brownies, still mumbling incoherently about dynamite, swayed for a moment and pitched forward. It was H. M. Stanley Bright who kept him from going face down into the weeds.

On the 16th of October, Brownies, his face marked with red splotches which had not yet healed, was again in the familiar office, sitting across the oaken table from H. M. Stanley Bright. The little blonde brought out the sheaf of papers. She smiled pleasantly at Brownies and handed the papers to the official. His Majesty signed two sheets and sat fumbling with them while he blew a ring of smoke into the air.

"I fired you for insubordination, Bruton," he said at last.

Brownies nodded. The older man smoked meditatively for a long while. At last he continued musingly, a grim smile playing over his stern face.

"I made a bad mistake. The only trouble with you is you're nothing but a damn fool kid and never will be anything else."

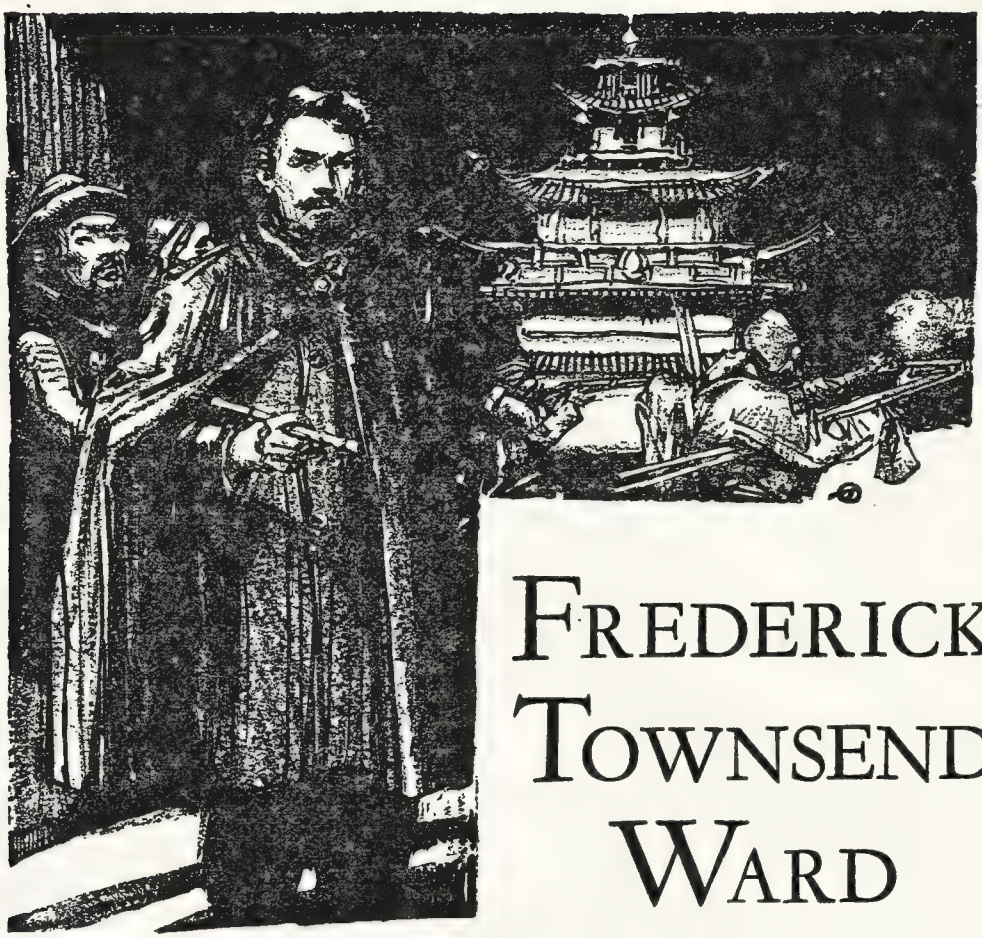
Bright paused again. The smile almost faded from Brownies' scarred face. He had expected something better; a compliment at least. Bright laid the cigar on the table. The eyes of blue ice seemed to melt for one wavering second, and when he concluded, it was in a softened, kindly tone.

"If you had been anything else, the K G & O would have been out a hundred thousand for equipment—a million for personal damages." Bright shoved the papers across the table to Brownies. "Here's your check for two thousand sixty-one dollars, full amount of the mileage earned by your turn while you were out of service."

"Thanks, Mr. Bright," murmured the engineer.

He placed the check in his wallet, read the contents of the manila sheet. It was an order to the roundhouse caller to place him once more on the engineer's board the following day.

"I made out that order for tomorrow, Bruton," growled the super, "because, this being the first day of the season, I figured you'd probably want to go duck hunting today."



FREDERICK TOWNSEND WARD

"Number One" Nemesis

By JAMES W. BENNETT

A *BEAU SABREUR*, imperturbable, immune to fear, riding into the cannon's mouth, infusing his tatterdemalion troops with his own sublime assurance of victory, planning his battles with definite military genius, this was Frederick Townsend Ward. Born in Salem, dying in China, he came on to this earth as a member of a socially prominent family, and left it worshiped by an alien people as a war god.

To say that Frederick Ward changed the destiny of nations even more profoundly than did Napoleon Bonaparte might seem a statement too absurd to be seriously entertained. Yet if this black haired, burning eyed Yankee had not appeared in China at a crucial moment during the middle of the last century, the present pages of world history would unquestionably have to be rewritten.

Ward espoused the cause of empire. He defeated a movement to overthrow the Manchu Dynasty then in power.

Against him was arrayed an amorphous body of men, variously estimated at thirty, forty, fifty million. They were called Taipings: the Long Haired Rebels. Had they won, they would have imposed upon China a variety of Christianity. They would have opened that land to the breath of new winds, new social theories. They would have inoculated the entire Far East with their desire for conquest. The so called Yellow Peril might have been a very vital thing, and the nations of the West might have had to stand shoulder to shoulder to repel the hordes of the East. There might have been no Sedan, no San Juan Hill, no Ladysmith, no Vimy Ridge. The Occident would have been too busy, warring against the Orient.

Like many another soldier of fortune, Frederick Ward believed that he led a charmed life. He rode into battle unarmed. He took risks that were inexcusable. In spite of his faith in his invincibility to cold lead, the bullet was finally molded which brought his career to a full stop. And by one of those ironic twists of history—combined with a bland assumption of British superiority—the English General Gordon (Chinese Gordon) has been given the credit for the Taiping defeat. Frederick Ward has been airily written down as a Yankee adventurer. Yet it was Ward who broke the back of the Taiping revolt and the hearts of their leaders, before Gordon appeared on the scene.

Ward's preparation for his destiny was thorough. As a boy of sixteen he left school to take the post of second mate on a clipper ship bound for China. That he obtained mastery over the shellbacked, tar fingered seamen—any one of whom could have cracked his slender spine with bare hands—is evinced by the glowing testimonial given Ward by the ship's captain on berthing in Salem.

But the seafaring life was not his goal. War was his tocsin. On his return he enrolled in Norwich University for courses in military tactics. Here he remained for a year, until ebbing finances forced him again to the sea. This time, his billet was that of first mate on the *Russell Glover*, his father in command.

Subsequently he took posts on a number of ships, plying between the two Americas and the Orient. During an interlude in this seafaring life, Ward landed in Central America where he met that great filibuster, William Walker.

Walker planned to conquer Nicaragua and set up a dictatorship. Frederick Ward spent a year under Walker's banners, aiding the elder soldier of fortune to organize his army.

But Ward was too much of an individualist to enjoy laboring for another. He resigned his commission in Walker's army and after adventuring in Mexico—where he refused a commission in the Mexican army—he again took to sea.

This time he signed on as first mate of the finest American clipper ship then afloat, the famous *Westward Ho*. Fresh from drilling Central American peons, Ward demanded strict discipline. As the *Westward Ho* was rounding the Horn, the ship's crew signalized their displeasure at the youthful martinet by tossing him overboard. He managed to clutch at a rope and to pull himself up the ship's side to the deck. There, by dint of sheer nerve, he cowed the crew into submission to his will. When one realizes that Ward was slender in build, medium in height and carried no weapon, one is given an inkling of his courage against odds.

Ward's experience as a commander of sailors and an organizer of armies was a perfect preparation for the work to which he was to give his life. During his several trips to China he had learned of the Taipings. Slowly a plan formed in his mind to rid that nation of this enormous, incalculable menace.

HE WAS in Salem when the idea finally crystallized and it was characteristic that, instead of waiting for a ship to take him to China, he set out precipitously on horseback—alone—across America. Alone, scorning all escort, he rode across

the prairie reaches and along the Santa Fé Trail. That destiny which seemed so careful to protect him carried him past the hazards of wandering bands of Indians on the warpath. Unscathed, he reached San Francisco.

Taking the first available ship, he landed in Shanghai—to find the foreign colony there frightened nearly witless by a threatened advance of the Taipings.

These Taipings had begun as a small sect in South China, which had imperfectly digested the tenets of Christianity. They were led by a Chinese fanatic, given to epileptic visions, who proclaimed himself the Little Brother of Jesus Christ.

The sect grew, attaching many disaffected Chinese elements. Men had grown restive under the misrule of the Manchu Dynasty which, after three hundred years of power in China, was still regarded as alien.

The Taipings added to their lure a mumbo-jumbo of catchwords and mystical incantations that professed to make them immune to death. Under them many secret societies—so dear to the Chinese heart—flourished.

The movement increased in violence and became actively belligerent. Taiping armies swept north to the Yangtzse valley. Whole cities were wiped out—as many as two hundred thousand persons in each being put to the sword. China, today, is dotted with the ruins of these ghost cities, mute evidence of the Taipings' inordinate ruthlessness.

Ward at once plunged with his characteristic energy into the task of forming an army to meet this menace to Shanghai. It was a hard bitten, reckless and godless aggregation that he gathered: deserters from the foreign ships lying in the Huangpu Basin, Manilamen, wiry Filipinos, beachcombers—all men who preferred fighting to work.

Yet in amalgamating his forces, Ward soon ran against an obstacle—lack of funds. But the Yankee soldier was a true son of New England, shrewd at a bargain. Coolly he proposed to the Chinese merchants of Shanghai to capture certain adjacent cities then held by the Taipings, in exchange for stipulated bags of silver. Since the Chinese are a practical people, the expression of idealism for its own sake leaving them completely baffled, Ward's system was excellent and the money was forthcoming. That the money was to be used faithfully to pay his troops and to enlarge his army, he kept concealed from the merchants. They would not have understood.

Under his hands, the tiny force became pliable, evincing a passionate loyalty to him and a desire to obey his lightest command. With high hopes, Ward moved upon the nearest and most menacing Taiping stronghold, Sungkiang. Up the Huangpu River the force proceeded. It disembarked some four miles from its objective and prepared to capture the city.

The walls of Sungkiang appeared deserted as the force crept up during the night. Ward waited for dawn to order the attack. But in the dawning light, the summit of the walls was seen to be thronged with armed Taiping troops. Ward's scaling ladders were contemptuously pushed backward. Bullets fell like summer hail. Ward's ranks were riddled.

Bareheaded, clad in a dark cloak, a walking stick in his hand, he strove desperately to reform his forces. Through the holocaust he moved unharmed.

But his attack was beaten off. In his first attempt Ward failed. This was in June, 1860. The "Coolie Emperor," as the Little Brother of Jesus was called by the foreigners, still held undisputed sway over the Yangtzse valley. Shanghai, with its prosperous shipping, its pompous Occidental traders in silk and tea, its portly Chinese merchants waxing fat on their enormous profits—Shanghai was in even more imminent danger of capture and destruction.

Completely undaunted, Ward enlisted more men, bargained for money with the Chinese—a harder task now—bought a better grade of arms and ammunition, and prepared his second expeditionary force against Sungkiang.

This time he brought cannon to batter down the strategic East Gate which pierced the city wall. This time he did not wait until morning, but attacked in the blackness of night.

Again the Taipings rushed to man the walls. They were met by a heavy cannonade—forerunner of the modern barrage. Under cover of this Ward advanced. His cannon had breached the outer gate but an inner one remained. It was flanked by a moat and set at an angle so that his guns could not reach it. This second barrier, Ward saw, would have to be blasted.

Led by their leader, a party of troops rushed bags of powder across an open court, enfiladed by a murderous fire from the walls above. Again we have the sign of the charmed life. Men fell all about Ward. The head of one of his lieutenants was blown off, not two paces away from the leader. But Ward moved on, imperturbable, detached. Only his burning eyes showed the excitement under which he labored.

HIS example electrified his troops; shouting hoarsely, they pressed on in the face of that whining, whistling death. The powder was laid against the inner gate. Only then did the attackers fall back, to wait for the explosion. The fuse had been cut too long, and for an eternity the party stood, high keyed and shivering with excitement.

But at last the unholy thunder came and the air was filled with flying débris. Again the attackers seemed doomed to failure. The great gate was made of age hardened wood, with exceptionally strong cross barring of iron. As the attacking party rushed forward, coughing from the smoke and dust, they found that the massive door still partially barred the way. Only space enough had been blasted open to allow the entry of one man at a time.

Here lay certain death. Inside waited religion crazed soldiers—equally sure of their charmed lives—contemptuous of Ward and his puny force, flushed by their previous victory over him. Suicidal as the act was, Ward was the first man to plunge forward—unarmed as always—through that narrow aperture.

Without hesitation, his officers and his men followed. They carried Colt revolvers, effective weapons at close quarters—particularly against the antiquated matchlocks of the Taipings. A few of Ward's men even had those new fangled repeating rifles—which were as apt to miss firing altogether as to repeat their message of death.

The fighting at close quarters was desperate. From the gate there was an incline which led to the inner wall. For two hours the Taipings contested this ramp. Throwing away their ancient fowling pieces, the Long Haired Rebels fought with curved swords. Against these the attackers countered with cutlasses and Malay *krisses*.

The defending force was estimated at six thousand fighting men. Ward's attackers were but two hundred—although their number was to be augmented by a Chinese army of some seven thousand imperial troops in the rear. Very much in the rear, as subsequent events showed!

Outnumbered thirty to one, Ward's army slowly changed the odds. By sheer, desperate perseverance, at last the inner wall was theirs. Without allowing them a moment's rest, Ward caused the guns of the defenders to be turned inward, against the city.

As morning came and the Taipings learned how pitiably small was the force of Ward, they again pressed forward. But Ward possessed some advantage in his position and to this he added breastworks hastily thrown up by the weary men.

Even to Ward—who could never envisage failure—it soon became apparent that he would have need for that Chinese army, somewhere leisurely approaching in the distance. In the meantime, he must stave off the repeated and increasingly spirited attacks from within the city. He fashioned a rope sling and sent a messenger over the wall, to tell his Chinese

allies to hurry to the aid of the party.

Hour after hour dragged on. Three more messengers were sent. In spite of fatigue and wounds, the force held its position. The hot day at last passed without sign of the rescuing force. Not a man in that little band of heroes—with the exception of Ward—expected to leave the wall alive. Their leader, it is reasonably safe to say, did not doubt his ultimate victory. Fiery man that he was, his nerves were under complete control. Never once, during that trying time, did he lose command of a single facial muscle, or allow his tongue to utter either imprecations or laments. It was his marvelous sang-froid that carried his troops through.

By the following morning the attackers were reduced to a company of less than a hundred — gaunt, starved and thirsty, nearly all wounded. But, in the distance, sounded the mournful bray of a Chinese bugle. Recklessly they rose from their breastworks and cheered. At last the rescuing army was approaching.

The Taiping fire lulled. Before the imperial troops had even reached the wall the Long Hairs were in full rout. Down tumbled the hundred heroes into a strangely silent, deserted appearing city, giving back ghostly echoes to their cries.

Ward had won his first major victory. Sungkiang, the greatest menace to Shanghai, was swept clean of Taipings. From that moment Frederick Ward became the hope of the Empire, the miracle man of China.

This black haired, nasal voiced Yankee now realized that he had pushed as far as he could with his mixed assortment of Manilamen, ship deserters and cutthroats. With them, at best, he could wage only guerrilla warfare. His plans were more ambitious. He had vowed to exterminate the Taipings. And the fact that the number to be extirpated totaled thirty million men did not in the least daunt Frederick Ward.

In the back of his mind had lain the idea of welding together a body of Chinese troops. With the loyal native peasants to draw upon, his supply of manpower would not be limited. In fact there were as many imperially minded Chinese north of the Yangtzse River as there were Taipings, south of that great stream.

WHEN Ward first broached the scheme a horrified chorus rose from the colony of foreign merchants and missionaries in Shanghai. The Chinese, they said, could not and would not fight. Witness the manner in which Ward, himself, with less than two hundred men, had held at bay a force of many thousand Taipings on the wall of Sungkiang. Witness, too the dilatory tactics of the imperial army that had been sent to relieve the American.

But Frederick Ward was stubborn. He had seen the deeds of heroism performed by individual Taipings. Given adequate leadership, he believed the Chinese would fight. And leadership was precisely the thing he was able to offer.

Before Ward could begin his new task, however, he was forced to engage in considerable political skirmishing with the British. To protect their nationals in Shanghai, they had anchored a small fleet in the river. The admiral of this flotilla feared Ward's prestige. The Englishman even went so far as to capture Ward and imprison him aboard the flagship.

Ward escaped by diving through the porthole of the cabin where he was confined into the muddy Huangpu. He was picked up by a sampan manned by his lieutenants, who had smuggled word to him the hour of the night that they would steal up to the warship.

His army of bravos, thoroughly incensed over his capture by the English, threatened to fight the whole British fleet. The admiral called for a truce and extended apologies. Perhaps the Englishman thought that if the Yankee adventurer were given enough rope he would eventually hang himself.

Ward moved his base of operations to Sungkiang, which he still held. There he began the herculean task of turning coolies into first class fighting men. As leaven for

his loaf, he sifted his original force through the ranks as commissioned officers. He retained his Manilamen as a spearhead to throw swiftly into battle where the need was greatest.

From the start Ward strove for mobility, speed of movement. For Prussian precision he cared little, nor for the appearance of his troops on dress parade. He did, however, devise a uniform for his troops, not unlike that of the French Zouaves. More than that, he saw to it that his soldiers were promptly paid and well fed.

This, be it said, was more than the Taipings were doing. Rich as the Yangtzse valley was, they had been bleeding it for ten years. Now they were experiencing difficulty in getting food supplies. Ward did not have that problem to face, since junks from the north—where the Long Hairs had not yet penetrated—brought adequate supplies into Shanghai.

In February, 1862, word came to Ward that a large body of the enemy was marching on Shanghai. It was apparently to be their most determined effort to capture the city, since spies stated that the number under arms was in excess of thirty thousand. Ward's Chinese army was untried, but the challenge must be met. His force numbered a bare thousand, but one regiment.

He moved promptly to meet the Taipings who, on learning of his approach, paused and hastily threw up stockades.

Ward's raw Chinese troops swung into action. The enemy's stockades were first shelled. There came the order to fix bayonets—then to charge.

Steadily the peasant soldiers pressed forward. They were obeying Ward who had told them to advance—and to keep on going. For a time, the Taipings fought desperately; but the waves of tenaciously advancing troops would not be denied.

"Surely," thought the Long Hairs, "these men are not Chinese; they are Foreign Devils, wearing Chinese skins. Since they *are* devils, we can not hope to defeat them."

Throwing down their arms, the Taipings broke and fled in confusion.

During the battle Ward displayed his customary indifference to the fire of the enemy. Forward he went with his shock troops, smoking a Manila cheroot, casually slapping a thin Malacca cane against his leg. His dark cape belled in the wind . . . Small wonder that he should have been looked upon by his soldiers—and by the enemy as well—as more than human, a demigod who had strayed to earth.

The defeat changed to utter rout. A thousand disciplined troops had vanquished more than thirty thousand undisciplined ones. All China suddenly rang with the prowess of Ward and his men. Even the Doubting Thomases among the foreigners in Shanghai were convinced.

For the first time in many long moons the emperor in far Peking began to feel confident that his dynasty, by the favor of heaven, would be saved.

BUT the Taiping menace was hydra headed. Their forces were numerically so strong that when one army was wiped out, two new armies sprang up to replace it. As for the individual Taiping soldier, like the Moslem, he felt that he would "acquire merit" were he to die in the cause of the leader of the revolt, the "Heavenly King".

This man, although he continued to be referred to by the foreigners as the Coolie Emperor, was worshiped by his own followers as a divine being, a legend. It is significant that he sprang from the south, always China's hotbed of revolt. From the same province, Kwangtung, fifty years later, another revolution was begun —that succeeded—under the banner of the Cantonese, Sun Yat-sen.

In spite of the derogatory nickname, the Taiping leader had been a scholar and the son of a farmer who was headman of a village near Canton. Born of the Hung clan, he added to his patronymic the names, Siu-tsuen, "Elegant and Perfect". He had studied to pass the civil service examinations which would have afforded

him opportunity for political advancement. But, on taking the tests, he failed repeatedly.

Humiliated by his failures, he fell ill with brain fever. During the progress of his malady he experienced many dreams and hallucinations the memory of which, on his recovery, were never effaced. During his convalescence he came into possession of several Christian missionary tracts, imperfectly translated into Chinese. These profoundly affected the elegant and perfect one. He embraced Christianity. But with this act, he failed to embrace the major Christian tenet which bids a man love his enemies.

Instead, Siu-tsuen became actively militant. He identified the Manchu rulers of China with the demons that had harried him during the course of his delirium. A plan formed in his mind to exterminate the Manchus and to put to the sword all who would not subscribe to his religious beliefs.

Around him kindred spirits quickly gathered, not only political malcontents but men who were able to fall into trances and froth at the mouth. These symptoms were counted signs of holiness by the simple minded peasants, and acted as excellent propaganda for the Taiping cause.

The movement grew, losing its initial resemblance to Christianity. It added demon worship and counted on amulets and incantations to enlist the belief of a superstitious and credulous people. It soon became—in point of numbers—the largest army of revolt that the world has ever known.

In Nanking on the Yangtzse, in the center of the territory that he had laid waste, the "elegant and perfect" emperor set up a court that vied in splendor with that of the Manchu monarch in Peking. Siu-tsuen elected to live in complete retirement, permitting his epilepsy-ridden generals to conduct their campaigns as best suited them.

And, without serious opposition, his troops devastated the rich and smiling land—until Frederick Townsend Ward, "No. 1" Nemesis, finally appeared.

After his defeat of the thirty thousand, Ward recruited his native army to the strength of three regiments. From this time on his record is one of success. Each battle was characterized by Ward's daring strategy and by the surmounting of tremendous obstacles.

The Manchu emperor bestowed upon Ward's force the title—deserved if ever a name was—of Chang Sheng Chun, the "Ever Victorious Army".

Ward, himself, was made a mandarin of the 4th class. He was privileged to wear the hat with the purple button and peacock feather, the robe embroidered in golden thread with the tiger, the *putzu* of this rank.

A facet in Ward's many-sidedness was his ability to make himself liked by the Chinese. In spite of his strict emphasis on obedience, he had none of the brutal arrogance characteristic of the white man in the East. Numberless stories told of him indicate his ability to catch the Chinese point of view. He bowed to their prejudices and comprehended their almost incalculable whims. It was as though he was bound by a spiritual affinity with these people whom he genuinely loved.

Soon he was to make another alliance that bound him even more closely to China. He married the little Chang Mei, daughter of Taki, a Chinese merchant who had been his first and strongest financial backer.

Those nuptials must have seemed a little strange to Ward—far different from the weddings he had witnessed as a boy in a bare Salem meeting house, with a Presbyterian minister uttering the brief words of the contract. For Ward's marriage was solemnized in elaborate Chinese fashion.

The contents of two cups of wine and honey were mingled and the contents drunk by the man and the woman. The "marriage reader" droned in monotonous sing-song the genealogy of the bride, tracing her "highly honorable ancestors" back to legendary times. What geneal-

ogy did he recite for the groom? Did he invent highly fabulous accounts of warrior progenitors, allied to the gods? Or did he utter the bald truth, that Ward was son of a merchant and sea faring man? Grandson of a sailor? Descendant of a long line of shrewd, acidulated, upright, quick thinking Puritans?

THE delay for the honeymoon was brief. There was more and yet more fighting to be done. Ward must lead his men. Unlike Chinese generals whose habit it was to keep their precious persons safely in the rear, Ward's place was in the front.

Smoking his inevitable cheroot, twirling his Malacca cane, he managed to stroll into the dead center of each and every battle. His officers were killed around him, but he moved serenely on. At his side was shot the admiral of the French fleet, during one of the battles in which the French were cooperating with Ward. Or, to be precise, the head of the admiral was blown off.

In spite of his theory of a charmed life, Ward himself had been spattered by shrapnel in one of his earlier engagements. He had been forced to take a ship for France where a Parisian surgeon skilfully rebuilt a portion of his face. Ward persisted, however, in the belief that the bullet was not molded which could take his life. And his men, seeing those continually hazardous chances that he took, held the same belief.

With Ward it was more than a boast; it was a fundamental expression of faith in his destiny. Possibly it was one of the secrets of his invincibility. Although the lethal bullet *was* molded that put an end to Ward's career—it did not wing its deadly way until he had broken the power of the Taipings, rendering the task of his successor, General Gordon, comparatively easy.

It was during a minor engagement that the end came. Ward was standing before the walled city of Tsz'ki, discussing the plan of an attack which was to take place in a few moments. As usual, he disregarded the swarming buzz of Taiping bullets that sent plumes of dust spurting up around him. His lieutenants knew him too well to remonstrate or to suggest that he seek a less exposed spot; Ward would only have laughed.

Suddenly he clapped a hand to his midriff and said quite simply—

"I've been hit."

One of his lieutenants gently lifted the slender figure and carried him off the field—Ward protesting. As he was being borne toward the rear, a detachment of men hurried forward at a run. To their captain Ward called in a hoarse voice:

"You must take the wall with a rush. The enemy are very numerous."

The words rather neatly sum up Ward's entire series of campaigns. His attacks all had to be done with a rush. And the enemy was invariably numerous. So numerous that Ward looked upon odds of ten to one against him as being comparatively favorable. In some of his battles the odds had been a hundred to one.

Ward insisted on waiting on the fringe of the battle until word came giving its outcome. As ever, the attack succeeded. His men had climbed the city walls, swarming up their scaling ladders in the face of withering rifle fire, tilted cauldrons of boiling oil, great stones hurled from the ramparts. He nodded his satisfaction and lapsed into a coma. He roused himself once to speak about the disposition of his property. Almost his last words were—

"Ever—victorious—army."

When word of Ward's death reached the city of Sungkiang, the inhabitants went into solemn mourning—as though a near and dear relative had died. Their grief was genuine; he had been their savior.

Ward had requested that his body be buried in the courtyard of the Confucian temple there. It was an extraordinary wish for a foreigner to make, but indicative of the profound influence that China had exerted upon him. The request was granted.

Li Hung-chang, China's world famous statesman, petitioned the throne to accord posthumous honors to Ward. To this the emperor consented. He ordered that temples be erected to Ward's memory; one in Ningpo, the scene of a brilliant victory, another in Sungkiang. On Ward he bestowed a patent of nobility that included the ennobling of each of his Puritan forebears.

But a gentleman in our legation in Peking—perhaps jealous of Ward's posthumous fame—lifted pious hands and declared that such practises were "heathen". As a missionary as well as legation secretary, he objected particularly to the erection of the temples. He raised such a hullabaloo that President Lincoln was reluctantly forced to request the Chinese throne to rescind its decrees. The Chinese were mystified and more than a little angry. They could not comprehend such repudiation of a hero.

Fifteen years later, Li Hung-chang decided to brave American public opinion and make reparation to Ward. Perhaps he felt that Ward's ghost might turn angrily against the land that it had served so gloriously during its lifetime, and commit untold havoc. A temple was erected at Sungkiang and dedicated in 1877.

The shrine still stands there, well tended, a small but beautifully proportioned building. On the altar stands the Spirit Tablet of Ward, a blue plaque with his name etched in gold ideographs. On the wall is an inscription:

> A wonderful hero from beyond the seas, the fame of whose deserving loyalty reaches around the world, has sprinkled China with his azure blood. A happy seat among the clouds and temples standing for a thousand Springs, make known to all his faithful heart.

As I paused before that shrine, one Spring day not long ago, I found two candles burning before the Spirit Tablet, and a stick of incense sent a plume of feathery blue smoke spiraling to the roof beams. A Chinese came in, bowed thrice to the tablet and lighted a second stick of incense.

To test him, I asked blandly—

"Who was this man?"

"A foreigner, like yourself," he answered promptly. "Also he was a war god."

"A god?"

"What else?" he replied positively, and slipped away from the shrine.

There is a belated postscript to the Ward saga, and a characteristically American one. After allowing his exploits to be forgotten for many years, the profound effects of his life and deeds to remain unknown in the United States, the Americans in Shanghai have at last paid him one single honor. At the close of the Great War, their veterans banded together and called themselves—

"Frederick Ward Post No. 1, American Legion, China."

CURIOS

By BILL ADAMS

I NEVER cared much for curios, for relics or heirlooms, or any junk of that sort. At one time and another I have possessed a good many of the things that a sailor is apt to pick up while wandering here and there. I set no store by them. I have given parrots, parrakeets, or cockatoos, to a dozen different girls. I gave an old maid a monkey once, and once I gave a pair of Madagascar cats to a widow with whom I boarded between voyages.

Here and there I've distributed canary birds from Teneriffe, roibecks from Durban, cardinals from South America, love birds from Java. To an *estaminet* man in Antwerp I gave an armadillo in trade for two bottles of bock. I have had walking sticks made from the backbones of sharks, whale teeth with scrimshaw work on them, sealed jars containing Sargasso weed, stuffed flying fish, coral, coconut shells with little pictures painted on them by natives of the Marquesas and the Solomons, native made baskets with worsted patterns worked on them by dusky island women, *assegais*, knobkerries, rhinoceros hide whips, silks from Japan, peacock fans from China.

Today I have nothing to show for my wanderings, save an old scrape here and there, or scars gained in fighting the sea winds. Looking at my walls, bare but for a few ship pictures, I do not regret. Sailors were ever generous with the simple harvests that they gathered from their sea! Yet there is one fragment of flotsam that I should like to own.

The first time I saw Pitcairn was on a dark night. The islanders saw our sidelights before we were aware of their island, so that the first indication we had of it was the blaze of their bonfire. Whenever they saw a ship's lights by night, if the weather was fine without too much of a sea running, they lighted a bonfire on the island's summit to let her know that she was seen. If she burned an answering flare it meant that she was stopping, and they started off to her; their two whale boats laden to the gunwales with sweet green oranges, green coconuts, mummie apples, pineapples, bananas and so forth.

The second time that I saw the island was by day. We came close to it, to windward; and so had no scent of it. There was a strong squally wind, with a lump of a sea running. Under topgallantsails, the ship was making fifteen miles an hour; more when the squalls struck her. Even had it been fit weather for boats the skipper would not have hove his ship to while she was making that good speed toward home. We sailed on.

The third time that I saw Pitcairn was on a bright, cloudless dawn. What little breeze there was was dying. I was on the poop that forenoon, painting the ship's name on her three poop lifebuoys. Now watching the island, now with a sharp eye to my work, the skipper paced to and fro.

"Do a neat job, boy."

By midforenoon, when we came abeam of the land, the lifebuoys were painted. The breeze had died utterly. The natives soon came aboard. While others brought fruit to us for barter, the headman went up to the poop where the skipper and his wife awaited him. Ordinarily the people of Pitcairn were not given to making friends with seafaring men.

Deeply religious, they feared contamination and, excepting in case of shipwreck, allowed no sailors ashore. But with our Old Man and his wife they were friendly, for during their more than thirty years of sailing together their ship had called there many times.

Some of the natives were at the forecastle door, bartering with the foremast sailors, others in the apprentices' half-deck where my comrades and I were trading when the mate's whistle sounded.

"Clear away the gig," he ordered.

The headman had invited our Old Man and Old Woman ashore to a feast.

I was one of the gig's crew—and let me live to a hundred, I'll not forget that day!

The ship under full sail, with her main yards aback. Her snow white canvas drooping idly from her idle spars. The blue transparent sea silent, motionless, about her. Our Old Man in his shore suit, smoking a fine cigar. Our Old Woman rigged in her best, carrying a green parasol. A whale boat pulled by the grandchildren of the Bounty mutineers making shoreward to either side of us. Flying fish darting. Birds circling ship and boats.

"Show 'em a sailor pulling, now, boys!" says our Old Man. With never a splash we feather our oars, making the teak gig fly till the natives are hard put to it to keep abreast of her.

On the beach in Bounty Cove a crowd of natives await us. Seizing the boat as we toss our oars, they haul her high.

"You boys stay with the boat," orders our Old Man.

"Oh, no, sir! Oh, no, sir!" remonstrates the headman.

Up the steep path to the village we go, smiling natives all about us. For forty days we have eaten salt pork, hard tack, pea soup; the hard fare of sailors. Now a table laden with roast chicken, roast kid, yams—more food than a hungry young sailor can believe exists, well nigh!

The headman asks a blessing. Our Old Man and Old Woman, we and the natives, stand with bowed heads.

Opposite each other at the end of one table sit our Old Man and Old Woman, waited on by the headman himself with men and women eager to help. At another table sit the four of us, waited on by laughing girls and young men. Hole by hole, we let out our belts.

Dinner is barely done when our Old Man rises. A whisper of wind is come.

We leave them calling long farewells from Bounty Cove.

"Come again, Captain! Lady, come again! Come again, young sirs!"

Whitecaps break about us while we speed toward the ship, waiting with the wind in her sails. The bells break out as we come alongside. I hurry to the poop to take my trick at the wheel.

"Southeast by south a quarter south," says the Old Man beside me, giving me the course for the distant Horn; for home nine thousand miles away.

It is a year and a half later, a year and a half after, with my apprentice days finished, I have left the ship when, with a gale in her topsails and a thunderous sea running, a ship bound in to Valparaiso sights, as night falls, the glow of fire upon the darkening sea ahead. Gloom deepens while she hastens toward where smoke columns whirl over the stormy sea. By the light of leaping flame her people spell the letters of the doomed ship's name, see that her boats are gone. Leaving the abandoned ship, they speed away for port. No man was ever found from that ship.

It was a full thousand miles from Pitcairn that my old ship perished. It was one year later, to the day, that a native found in Bounty Cove a fragment of flotsam from her. Until, long afterward, the master of another vessel told them that their friends had retired before the voyage that saw the ship's doom, the natives mourned our Old Man and our Old Woman for dead.

With all the broad Pacific to drift in, with wind and tide to swirl it hither and yon, one of the old ship's three poop lifebuoys had washed ashore at the one small accessible spot along the precipitous shore of Pitcairn. On it, to identify it, was the mossy, faded lettering that I had put there on the fine bright forenoon long ago.

Continuing

MONSIEUR LE FALCON

By ARED WHITE

A PLOT conceived by his cousin Ferdinand, and put into effect by Premier Thugutt's Black Cabinet, the inner sanctum of Austrian espionage, deprived young Lieutenant Count Otho of his rich estates in Lombardy, and sent him off to Paris under the pseudonym of Monsieur Le Falcon, believing himself to be serving his emperor as a trusted agent. With Napoleon's star steadily rising, anything French was hated and feared in Vienna; and Otho was French on his mother's side of the house.

Otho was met in Paris by one Major Moskolz, an Austrian spy. Moskolz, after advancing Otho an inadequate sum of money, mysteriously disappeared. Otho sought for days for the missing agent; then, almost starving, he took a position in a company of French players, where his experience in amateur theatricals served him so well that he quickly became famous for a burlesque of Napoleon.

One night Bonaparte, just returned from Egypt, came to the theater. After the performance Otho was placed in arrest, and taken before the Corsican, whom he hated as being responsible for Austria's distress. To his surprise, Napoleon received Otho kindly, complimented him upon his excellent characterization of himself—Bonaparte—and commissioned him a lieutenant of Hussars!

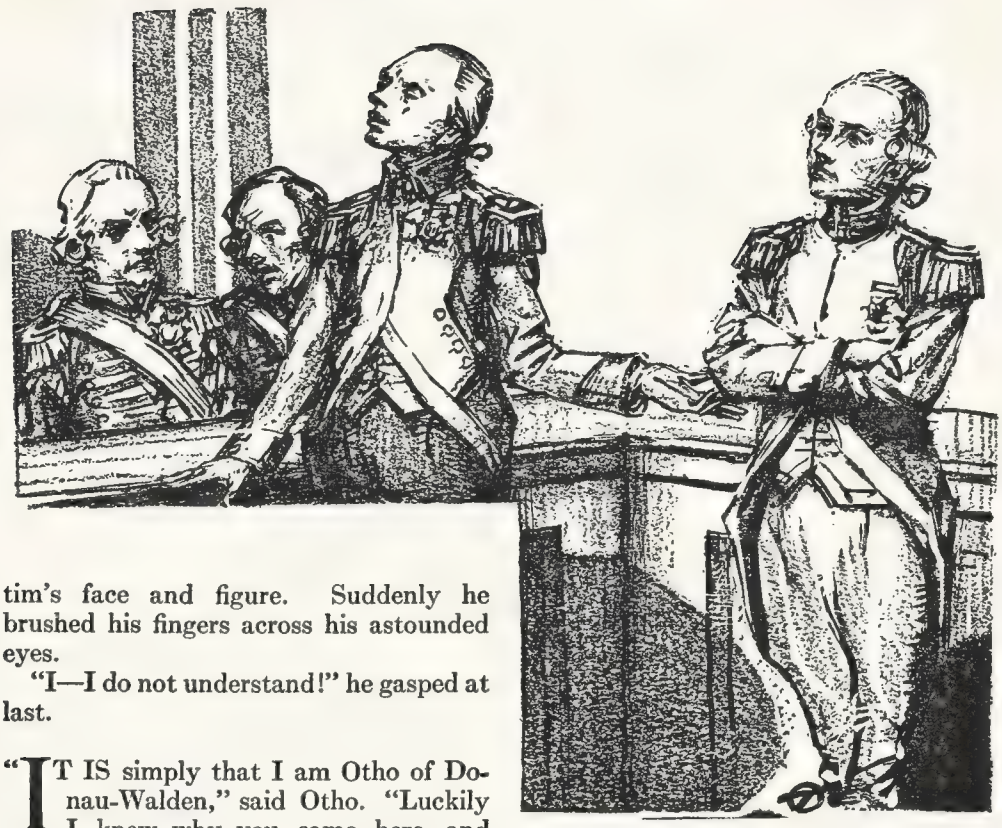
Secure in the knowledge that he had Napoleon's favor, Otho immediately identified himself with royalist moves to destroy the Corsican and again set up the Bourbon throne in France.

One night he was called to Bonaparte's chambers and informed that he was to accompany the First Consul on a tour of inspection to Dijon. Otho immediately joined his fellow-conspirators—and royalists were dispatched to points all along the route, determined upon the death of Napoleon. Then Otho learned, too late to call off the appointed assassins, that he himself was to make the trip, disguised as Bonaparte—who was to remain in Paris.

Afraid to eat for fear of poison, Otho was nearly famished by the time he arrived in Troyes, many leagues along the road to Dijon. There, when the cook brought to his rooms a supper, Otho was amazed to behold his own cousin Ferdinand playing the rôle of attendant upon Bonaparte. Well knowing that the food was poisoned, Otho ordered Ferdinand, who had not penetrated his disguise, to eat it himself. And at the terror in the other's face, he broke into a laugh.

"My dear Ferdinand," he said. "Don't you know Otho of Donau-Walden?"

Ferdinand searched his intended vic-



tim's face and figure. Suddenly he brushed his fingers across his astounded eyes.

"I—I do not understand!" he gasped at last.

"IT IS simply that I am Otho of Donau-Walden," said Otho. "Luckily I knew why you came here, and made your way easy as there are many things for us to consider."

"But you—the Corsican? It seems impossible!" Ferdinand gasped.

"I am Bonaparte exactly in the sense that you are Fiolet, my dear Ferdinand. A disguise."

"Le Montier told me nothing of this, Count Otho. He said merely that one of his agents accompanied the First Consul."

"But Le Montier did not know. You see, since the Corsican could not come, he sent me in this disguise. Therefore I am merely a clumsy political double, at which I would have revolted except for the thought of aiding our emperor's cause."

Ferdinand seemed unable to shake off his bewilderment.

"But we had it in Vienna that you were dead!"

"An exaggeration—" Otho smiled—"as your own eyes must convince you. But sit down. We must speak rapidly, while we are alone. There is much to say. First, word of the Countess Zita?"

Ferdinand was jolted out of his incredulous daze by this. He flushed, sat down and squirmed uneasily while he collected his wits.

"I take it the countess is in excellent health," he replied warily. "Though since she has been in mourning for you, I have seen nothing of her."

"A cruel hoax, the report of my death, Ferdinand. Only the emperor knows the truth, and Colonel Vekuss, who are sworn to silence by an unhappy necessity."

"Yes, yes, of course," assented Ferdinand, though the bewilderment was back in his eyes.

"Come, tell me quickly the vital news of Vienna. My estates? Has the emperor acted upon that matter? Or Baron Thugutt? I am choking for news."

"I am sorry, Otho." Ferdinand suddenly recovered his ready tongue. "The fact is, I've been in Vienna practically not at all in months. But come, Monsieur Le Montier waits. So perhaps we had better get down to business."

"Pardon. You're entirely right, Ferdinand. The interests of the crown demand our first thought; and the sooner we have disposed of that duty, the quicker I will be back in Vienna. Lean close. I go to Dijon to review the Army of Reserve in the guise of the First Consul. The army is being formed against the Austrians—"

"Our agents have gathered that information, Otho," Ferdinand broke in. "The Army of Reserve is but a bluff. A few regiments of levies, bolstered by a handful of veteran officers. Presently they will be fed to Moreau with which to attack our frontier. But for that we are prepared."

"I have suspected, Ferdinand, that the Army of Reserve was being formed to invade Italy."

"We do not have to depend on mere suspicions, my dear Otho. Our agents give us facts. We need not worry about the Army of Reserve at present. It is that Corsican we gun for, as we would for a wolf. His Majesty will never have a moment's comfort until Bonaparte is dead."

"Le Montier told you of the plan set for the cuisine at Paris?"

"We were preparing for that when diverted by this ruse. Le Montier will be furious that we have been tricked again."

"But in ten days I will be back in Paris, Ferdinand. Then we can lay our plans again."

"Ten days is a long time to waste, Count Otho. Every day the Corsican strengthens his grip upon France and hedges in his own power with new barriers."

"I am the impatient one, Ferdinand. Until the Corsican is overthrown I am not allowed to return to Vienna. So you can readily guess that I will waste no opportunity. And much of importance may be learned at Dijon."

Ferdinand rose, drew the cork from a bottle of wine he had brought in with the poisoned dinner, and filled two glasses.

"Waste no thought upon Dijon," he replied. "The flower of Bonaparte's army is blocked in Egypt, whence it can not escape. The army of the frontier is too hard pressed by our Austrian corps to be a menace. The Army of the Reserve is a hoax, as I have said. Therefore think only of the work we have at Paris. Come, a toast. This wine has not been tampered with. To the emperor!"

They stood up, touched glasses.

"To his Majesty the emperor!" Otho echoed.

IT WAS close to daybreak when Lieutenant Fullois finally came in. He crossed the room noisily, pausing to drink what was left of a bottle of wine on the table, and tumbled across the First Consul's bed without removing uniform or boots. Otho rose a few minutes later from a sleepless night, had breakfast brought in, and roused the aide-de-camp.

Though he had been asleep less than half an hour, Fullois jumped up at once, stretched and presented himself with the freshness of a man who has had a virtuous night's sleep. Otho ate heartily. The way was clear now. His one discomfort was a gnawing restlessness to get into Dijon as quickly as possible, thence back to Paris. Paris once more had become a way station on the route back to Vienna; the First Consul's destruction Otho's passport home.

A grueling drive put them to Chaumont by sundown. Otho was for pushing on, with a change of horses, to Langres. But Fullois refused. He had important military matters at Chaumont and disappeared, after gulping his dinner, with the general of a division. The sun was well over the Vosges in the morning before he returned, ready for travel. Of his business he said nothing, of the presence of a division general in the minor village of Chaumont, he offered no information. At Langres, which they reached early in the

afternoon, another division general waited on Fullois. Night came, and the next morning, before Fullois was ready to leave Langres. Otho fumed at the delay.

"Dijon, monsieur, is our destination," he reminded Fullois sharply. "Dijon, where is centered the Army of the Reserve. The general himself gave me those instructions."

"Dijon, ho!" Fullois laughed. He gave a contemptuous shrug. "Then there is much that Monsieur the First Consul did not say to you, monsieur. My mission en route is of real substance, my friend. You go to Dijon for a mere hollow show. Remember that thought when you try hereafter to tell me my business."

The aide-de-camp's retort rekindled Otho's suspicions. There must be some deepseated meaning behind Fullois' words. He left the wine to the Frenchman thereafter, in the hope that it might loosen the aide's tongue. But Fullois was not to be brought back to the subject.

In any event their stay at Dijon was short enough to suit even the impatient Otho. They arrived late at night. Fullois disappeared at once with a grizzled general and did not reappear until morning. Then he brought decisive orders for immediate action.

"We move at once, Le Falcon," he announced. "The Army of Reserve is preparing itself for review and inspection at this moment. Your part is simple today. You will go with me by carriage to the field. On leaving the carriage we mount and ride the lines. When you travel at trot or gallop, remember that the First Consul is a miserable horseman. When the regiments present their eagles, lift your hat and nod. Return the salutes of regiments in the same manner. When all is ended and we are back at the carriage, say a few words of compliment to the generals, very coldly, and turn away into the carriage. We will drive off at once—for Paris."

"Excellent, monsieur," Otho responded gaily. "And now that the First Consul has had his orders from his aide-de-camp, lead out."

"A caution, Le Falcon." Fullois frowned. "Your eyes are too gay. Remember your scowl and the inclination of your head. Sour, man, sour! You must act your best today—for even the generals must think they are being reviewed by General Bonaparte himself."

Drums ruffled, bugles flourished as the First Consul left his carriage and strode to his horse. Awaiting him was the commander at Dijon and his staff, in brilliant uniform. They leaped from their horses and stood at salute while Otho strode to his mount, a magnificent white charger. He glowered at them, returned the salute casually and took the reins from an orderly. The orderly had been instructed in assisting the diminutive First Consul to his saddle; a cupping of his right hand, a quick upward lift.

Otho paused on a waggish impulse as he reached the horse. He called sharply to Fullois.

"My left boot, Lieutenant," he rasped, pointing to an imaginary splotch. "A touch with your kerchief, quickly!"

Fullois turned livid. But he did not hesitate. Springing forward, he whisked out his handkerchief, rubbed vigorously at the boot, stepped back and saluted.

"I will give the matter further attention later, my General," he said, a threat implicit in his voice meant only for Otho's ears.

Otho landed easily in the saddle and set off at a trot. The feel of a fine horse under him again was invigorating. It was with difficulty that he imitated the bouncing, twisting seat of the Corsican. Troops were lined up far into the distance. As he jolted down front and rear, there was a stimulation in having the center of the military stage. The roll of drums, the blaring of trumpets, the dipping of colors, the flashing of sabers and bayonets greeted his appearance before regiment after regiment. He rode out ahead, followed at a respectful distance by generals and staffs. Trumpeters, orderlies, aides-de-camp, a flagman, pressed close behind ready to receive and put into motion his slightest whim of command.

But as he rode on, the thing that finally detached itself was the wretched equipment, the inferior caliber of the men in the regiments. Old men and young boys, for the most part, with the veriest leavening of seasoned soldiers. Whole platoons of foot troops were without muskets; others had a few scattered arms. The artillery was of obsolete types, mostly large calibers and clumsily mobile. Even the cavalry was poorly mounted and ragged.

Half an hour completed the review. Otho estimated eight thousand troops, arrayed in long lines, with little depth, so that his eye was able to appraise easily and accurately the hollow fighting machine that lay behind this martial show. When he returned to his carriage, he waved aside the review. Fullois had instructed him to do this. And Otho surmised that the reason for this must be that the Army of Reserve could not break into lines and columns without a sickening jumble of disordered ranks.

He climbed from his horse, tossed the reins to the agile orderly, addressed a terse compliment to the rigid generals, tossed off a return of their salute and entered his carriage. Fullois leaped in behind him, a Grenadier slammed the door and the driver lashed his horses into a fast trot. Fullois rode in glum silence, bolt upright, his arms folded tight. Otho's mind raced back over the morning's picture. He remembered the words of Ferdinand. A sick cat, indeed, this Army of the Reserve. A mere bluff, intended to frighten the Austrians into hearing the Corsican's peace overtures.

As they left Dijon for the open fields, Fullois unbent, thrust his polished boot on the cushions and pointed a tense finger.

"You will notice, Le Falcon," he said, "that there is a splotch on my boot. *Sang dieu*, but you will kindly efface it at once with your handkerchief!"

"Only, my dear Fullois," Otho retorted, "when you are the general of an army and I your aide-de-camp will I perform such service." He added, with a sly laugh, "Though, if you are ever the general of an army, I wish you the good fortune to have a finer army than the one we have just inspected."

"You were not impressed, monsieur?"

"A mere skeleton, Fullois. Why, even the Austrians would laugh at the Army of the Reserve."

The aide-de-camp laughed heartily.

"Exactly as they are expected to do, my dear Le Falcon!" Fullois' eyes narrowed, his lips set. "*Diable!* But they would hardly laugh if they knew what is really the Army of Reserve!"

CHAPTER XVII

DEATH TO THE OGRE

ON REACHING Paris late at night of the fourth day of travel thereafter, Otho was smuggled into the Tuileries by a secret entrance, divested promptly of his masquerade and dismissed with brief ceremony by an aide-de-camp.

"When you are needed again, Citizen Lieutenant," said the aide crisply, "you will be sent for."

As the aide turned on his heel Otho breathed relief at this fortunate release. He had feared the possible ordeal of a personal report of his Dijon junket to the First Consul. His mind was flooded with his plans for the instant future; and there was always the danger that those searching eyes, that sensitive intuition of the Corsican, might read beneath the surface.

In a corridor of the official residence, as he was leaving, Otho came upon Bourienne. The secretary, his arms filled with immense rolled maps, gave him a casual look and hurried on without speaking. He caught a brief glimpse of a group of officers in a large room, their interest centered on a wall map. Otho recognized General Berthier in the center of the group. He saw, too, that many solemn faced functionaries of the civil government were waiting patiently in groups of two and three. Outside were a score of carriages, many of the drivers asleep at the reins.

Otho noted these tokens gratefully. They meant that Bonaparte and his official family were fully occupied with matters of moment. That left him free to follow his own plans without delay. He hurried into the streets to find a conveyance, drove across Paris, changing cabriolets from time to time so as to leave no trail, and brought up finally at the apartments of Le Montier.

It was shortly after midnight when he arrived. The house was plunged in darkness, Le Montier probably asleep. But Otho was moved by a sharp impatience. In the days of travel from Dijon he had laid his plans. First of all there was momentous information to be passed along to Vienna. Otho had divined that behind that Army of Reserve of Bonaparte's there was something more than a hoax, some titanic maneuver designed against Austria. Dijon was merely a blind, a cunning subterfuge devised by the Corsican to cover up his sinister designs. Fullois' chatter, closely as the fellow had guarded his tongue, confirmed the suspicions that had grown in Otho's mind out of the fragmentary information.

Otho started at the swift response to his tap at Le Montier's door. It yielded at the first rap, as if some one had been waiting for him. As the rays of a dark lantern flashed upon his face, Le Montier's voice cackled excitedly.

"It is you, Monsieur Le Falcon. You for whom we are waiting in a fever—and you are right on the dot of time."

"But I did not know I was expected, Le Montier," said Otho. "I've been back in Paris less than an hour, and fearful that I might not find you tonight."

"Ho, but our eyes have never left you, monsieur," gloated Le Montier. "Not from the instant you left Dijon until you entered the Tuileries. We have lost far too much time already, and must not cheat ourselves of a single precious instant. So we even estimated the very moment you should arrive—and here you are!"

Le Montier escorted him into the living room. Three men stood waiting. Otho's face lighted at sight of the elusive Moskolz among them. The Hungarian boomed an effusive welcome.

"Ah, it is you indeed, my dear Count Otho," he exclaimed, executing an airy salute and embracing Otho ostentatiously. "Here all these months that I have been mourning you for dead, you have been safely in hiding. Why did you not manage to get word to me?"

"I attempted that miracle, Major Moskolz," Otho replied dryly. "In fact I wore out many pairs of boots walking the streets of Paris in my search for some trace of you."

"Strange, strange," muttered the Hungarian. His eyes dropped and he shifted uneasily. "Of course, for a time I was forced to cover—and after that I was summoned to Vienna on a matter of—in fact on the sad matter of reporting your—er—disappearance, news which your dear friend the Colonel Vekuss received with the gravest concern."

Otho turned suddenly livid and clutched Moskolz's arm.

"You—reported me dead!" he shot out. "Did the Colonel Vekuss pass me for dead?"

Moskolz blinked rapidly, then broke into a laugh of easy assurance.

"But no, to be sure I did not, my dear Count. Please to have no uneasiness on that score. The colonel understands that you may show up."

Otho sank into a chair.

"You gave me a great jolt, Moskolz," he said. "A report of my death in Paris going from you to Vienna might have upset everything for me if conveyed to Baron Thugutt, and by him to the emperor."

"Ho, tomorrow I shall send a courier with word of your good health, my dear Count Otho. So now let us rejoice that you escaped the French guillotine—an answer to our prayers."

"That was easy enough," Otho rejoined tartly. "But it was not so easy to escape starving in Paris when you left me without funds, my dear Major. But no matter. I have survived handsomely—

and after all it has landed me in a fortunate position."

"A clever ruse, Count Otho. A clever ruse for which your reward shall be something handsome when you return to Vienna. But you must tell me how you arranged it. The Colonel Vekuss will be overwhelmed by the glorious news."

"An accident. A whim of chance, Major Moskolz. I would frankly have had no taste for worming myself into another's confidence. I was forced in—and so I accepted my lot and have made the most of it, though without deception. You see, it was—"

Le Montier thrust himself in front of Otho with an impatient toss of his arms.

"Come, come, messieurs!" he demanded. "Choose another time for reminiscence. There is serious business afoot tonight. What news have you to impart, Le Falcon? I choose to call you by that name as a matter of discretion, my dear Count."

"First, where is my cousin Ferdinand?" Otho demanded.

"Gone to Vienna to make report. He will return in a fortnight to join us. But come, time drags."

"I wish to speak first to Major Moskolz alone," Otho countered. "A report of special interest to us alone."

"We are among friends, Count Otho. All honorable men are joined together in the service of the crown these black days. So speak freely."

A FEELING of distrust that had laid hold of Otho at entering the room was not wholly allayed. But he accepted Moskolz's assurance.

"A courier must leave at once for Vienna, messieurs. Bonaparte has some mischief afoot, aimed at the Austrian crown. To save time I will write my report while the major enciphers it."

"Mischief—mischief?" Le Montier repeated fretfully. "You talk to us as if we were children, monsieur. What else but mischief has this vulture Bonaparte ever had afoot? Do you wish to make yourself ridiculous by such a report?"

"But I have reason to believe there is danger behind this Army of Reserve he is building up. Our Aulic Council must be told—"

Moskolz cut in with a strident laugh.

"You are far behind the situation, my dear Count. Where have you been that you do not know the French Army of Reserve is a scarecrow to scare the Austrians while Bonaparte stalls for peace? We have seen through all that from the very first."

"Not a scarecrow, messieurs!" Otho warned. "A ruse—a ruse to cover up a massing of forces. Some large purpose lies behind it all, a purpose I have yet to learn."

"To business!" Le Montier exploded. "Let us not quibble over meaningless details. Bonaparte is too busy plundering the French, feathering his own nest out of the public extremity, to waste his thoughts on serious military enterprises. But, no matter what he is doing, there is but one way to circumvent him. Civilization demands his head! The guillotine of kingly righteousness thirsts for his blood. And we are the disciples of justice who must bring his rascally neck to the knife."

M. Lissop eased forward, his eyes glowing, as Le Montier paused.

"More properly, messieurs," he corrected, with his cat-like smile, "we must bring his stomach to the poison. I have prepared—"

"Bonaparte dies this very week!" said Le Montier, ignoring Lissop. "Twice before he has cheated us. This time we will not fail. Are you ready, Monsieur Le Falcon?"

"I am ready, messieurs," said Otho resolutely. "I am ready, if you expect me to act with a plan of my own, one that will require patience; but an honorable plan."

"Ho, now you speak sensibly, Le Falcon," said Le Montier. "Tell us."

"Bonaparte has a habit of walking alone through the corridors of the Tuileries in the small hours of the morning. I will accost him, tell him of my grievance,

offer him a pistol with which to defend himself, and we shall fight at close quarters."

The jaws of the three men fell apart. They stood staring at him agape.

"I have planned it all to the smallest detail, messieurs. I have steeled myself for the ordeal, and my heart will not fail me. It will be a fair fight in which I shall be the victor. At the moment I shall be disguised as the Corsican and therefore able to escape in the confusion."

"*Sacrebleu!*" roared Le Montier. "Our cause is too sacred for such risks. Yours is the plan of a dreamer. I, for one, will not hear of it until every other plan has failed. We will proceed with the poison."

"You have failed at that often enough, monsieur," Otho reminded him. "Besides, I have no liking for such work if you are depending upon me to lay your poison at the Tuileries."

"Ho, such scruples!" said Le Montier hotly. "But would you poison a wolf that destroyed your cattle, monsieur?"

"Perhaps," Otho admitted reluctantly. "If every other way failed, I would consent to that."

"Then is not this Corsican a wild beast? A dangerous beast who preys upon France, a red monster who will shake all Europe and upset the throne of your own emperor if you do not destroy him?"

"If my own plan fails, then will be time enough—"

"Let us not waste time in argument. The trap is baited. Your own part need not ruffle you more now than it has in the past. Major Moskolz himself will masquerade as the chef. He is of Roget's stature. It is only for you to arrange for smuggling the chef outside while your major takes his place. Those stupid Mamelukes will not discover the difference—and when Bonaparte is dead they will be accused. There is small risk, Le Falcon, if you but do your small part well. Here, we will seal the pact in wine. All who are not traitors to their king will drink."

Le Montier opened a bottle of champagne with trembling fingers, poured four glasses and passed them solemnly around.

"Death to the beast—life to the king. Long live the king!" said Le Montier.

Otho raised his glass slowly, drained it in assent and snapped the stem between his fingers.

CHAPTER XVIII

A COURIER FROM ITALY

THE resourceful Fouche, master of intrigue and prefect of police, had one section of his secret minions whose sole occupation was the projection of plots against the First Consul's life. Day and night these officers plotted. They studied the Corsican's habits, his every movement, and planned his demise accordingly. Of course, with no thought of putting those plans into execution. Once they had hit upon some new plan of assassination, it was passed on to another and larger section that was charged with the Consul's protection.

Therefore the poison plot had been charted long ago. The greatest care was taken to purchase supplies secretly for the Bonaparte table. Only trusted men were allowed to enter the Bonaparte kitchens. The faithful Mamelukes, whose loyalty was unimpeachable, oversaw the cooking of the food and personally carried it to Bonaparte's table or desk.

By discreet reconnaissance, Otho learned these safeguards during the next three days. He also found a loophole in Fouche's safeguards. The trusted chefs came and went when off duty. They were not even shadowed. They had been studied, even to their remotest antecedents, and passed as men to be trusted. Their lot was linked to the Corsican. Napoleon's generosity with them removed any likelihood that they could be bribed.

So a substitution, Otho perceived, might not be difficult. Evidently the vivid Fouche imagination had not foreseen that possibility. There was, moreover, a remarkable similarity in height and weight between Roget and the Major Moskolz. A few deft touches of makeup,

a study of Roget's gait and mannerisms, ought to put Moskolz into the kitchens, once Roget had been seized and done away with. Moskolz would need then only bide his time, taking refuge in a moody silence, until Bonaparte called for one of his frequent omelettes.

Otho went about his part of the pact with small enthusiasm. His own plan had suited him better. But he found refuge in the words of Le Montier. After all, it was a matter of doing away with a dangerous beast. The emperor's cause was in jeopardy so long as the Corsican lived, and there was no choosing of methods. A duel, while more honorable, was less conclusive. If Bonaparte should chance to fire the lucky shot the situation would remain the same. The Austrians would have failed.

Moskolz was uneasy over his part in the desperate enterprise. He cursed the ill fate that had cast him in such a rôle. The circumstance of his physical resemblance to Roget, first noted by Ferdinand, had forced the issue. Ferdinand himself had given the order in the name of the Aulic Council, which meant there was no turning back for Moskolz. As he went about his preparations for the coup, Moskolz alternately bolstered his courage by noisy bluster and whined over the risks he must take. He charged Otho with responsibility for the escape. Otho must remain close at hand, disguised as the Corsican, ready to step in should there be some unexpected slip at the kitchens of the Tuileries. And Otho must escort him, pistols in hand, to a speedy carriage that would wait close by, ready to gallop the instant the poison was on its way to Napoleon's table.

By midweek their plans were completed. Moskolz, after many careful rehearsals under Otho's critical eye, was able to pass muster as Roget's double. He mastered Roget's lumbering gait, learned to cook an edible omelette and needed now only a favorable opportunity to strike. That moment must depend upon Bonaparte's certain presence, and then upon getting Roget into their power. Otho was left to adjust those details.

The problem of knowing for certain when the Corsican was at the Tuileries perplexed Otho as he returned to his billet from their final conference. Bonaparte so hedged his movements in secrecy that there was no saying where he might be found. The presence in the courtyard of generals, chargers and many carriages was no certain indication. Berthier held incessant conferences with officers of high rank while civil functionaries were forever summoning men of high estate.

But this barrier suddenly vanished when Otho reached his billet. The landlady rushed to meet him, handing him with trembling hand a broad white envelop. It had been brought by a gilded aide-de-camp, an officer of the consular guards, she exclaimed. Otho tore it open and read the brief but significant legend:

> You will report immediately to the First Consul.
>
> —BOURIENNE

Otho blinked at the summons briefly, hurried into his dress uniform and drove to the Tuileries. There was an acute discomfort in the thought of facing the Corsican at the present moment. Otho had hushed his qualms repeatedly during the week by reminding himself that it was not his plan, that the service to his emperor justified the means. There had also been stimulation in the thought that a few days might see him hurrying back toward the frontier, toward Vienna, his exile at an end at last.

AS HE entered the palace of the government, he steeled himself for the ordeal. He held no doubt that the First Consul had some new task for him, perhaps another masquerade. But he was resolved not to be diverted now. It was no time to accept defeat. He would find a way, no matter what project was given him, to follow Roget and pass the word to Moskolz.

He reported to an aide-de-camp of General Berthier. The aide escorted him

at once through winding corridors to the First Consul's chamber. There another aide took him in charge and admitted him into a large reception chamber. Through a broad open door he saw a group of four officers. They were standing with heads bowed, eyes intent on the floor. At their feet was sprawled a fourth officer. Otho saw with a start that the man on the floor was Napoleon Bonaparte. The Corsican was lying across a large map, his chin resting in his cupped hands. No one spoke, or moved. Half an hour ticked by, an hour. Twice in that period the Corsican shifted his position and ran a white index finger thoughtfully along a segment of map.

During this time Otho was alone in the ante-chamber. The officers at the map were oblivious to his presence. He craned his neck for a view of the map but could not identify it from where he sat. A map of the French frontier, he guessed. The fact that the Corsican pored over it with such deliberation was significant in itself. He remembered his suspicions of the Army of Reserve. He remembered the stories of the Corsican's evil genius in maneuvering troops in battle. It must be true, then, that some maneuver was in the making, some new battle in the stew.

Another hour had ticked by before there was an interruption. An aide burst into the room, stalked through to the map conference, stood uncertainly for a moment, then cleared his throat to draw attention. A staff officer glared at him. Bonaparte did not lift his eyes from the map.

"The courier, my Captain—the courier from Italy has arrived," the aide announced.

Bonaparte sprang to his feet, his eyes burning with eagerness.

"Lieutenant Le Carbenne?" he demanded.

"It is the lieutenant himself, my General."

"The lieutenant himself," Bonaparte repeated with an amused smile at the expression. "Well, show the sly rascal in this instant!"

A lithe young officer entered at the heels of the aide. His face was as expressionless as a Viennese doll and, except for the marks of rain and wind and the small black mustache, as smooth of feature. Otho noted that the lieutenant was an undersized youngster, no larger than the Corsican. His large brown eyes stared straight to the front and he stretched his short lean legs in an effort at soldierly stride.

"Ah, monsieur, you are here at last!" exclaimed the Corsican. He eyed the diminutive Hussar with mingled interest and amusement. "Well, what fortune?"

"I have seen their dispositions, my General," said the Hussar in a forced, throaty voice. "They hold all Italy in a terrible grip of steel."

"Ah, tell me briefly, Le Carbenne—a picture of their whole line," Napoleon prompted eagerly.

"From the most eastern passes to the approaches of Genoa, the Austrians hold everything, almost in the way that you guessed, my general, before I left Paris. Even now they are moving from Turin on Genoa to crush the General Massena. Their armies of all arms number ninety thousand."

"So. And massing their armies in their movement west, I am to understand?"

"In such force, Monsieur the First Consul, that Massena can never hope to hold out against them, I regret to report."

"Splendid!" exclaimed the Corsican. "You bring fine news, Le Carbenne!"

Bonaparte seized the young Hussar and drew him forcibly to the floor. He ran his own finger swiftly from place to place across the map. The Hussar gasped astonished assent. There were only one or two minor corrections.

"It is, my General, as if you had seen with your own eyes," said Le Carbenne in an awed voice.

"A simple matter," replied Napoleon with a shrug. "A simple matter to gage the stupidity of the Austrians. *Ventre-bleu!* Even if Melas were not in his dotage and Zach, his chief of staff, a dumb ox,

that blind Aulic Council would be sure to blunder their armies into a trap. But that will be all for today, Le Carbenne. You will remain in Paris for a few weeks—perhaps longer. General Berthier will be wanting details. Later I will wish to question you further. In the meantime—" Bonaparte paused to fix Le Carbenne with a whimsical smile—"you may amuse yourself as you see fit, at the opera or in a harmless flirtation."

Le Carbenne flushed and drew himself up haughtily.

"If it pleases my General, I will choose my own diversions!" he said testily.

"Ho, you have not forgotten how to be impudent, monsieur!" said the Corsican with a taunting laugh. "Have a care or I shall revenge myself one day by attaching you to the staff of my General Desaix—and a whisper in his ear concerning you!"

"There was nothing further, my General?"

"Nothing." Bonaparte sobered. "Nothing except that I wish to commend Lieutenant Le Carbenne upon the excellence of his work and announce his promotion to a full lieutenant of the Hussars. *Adieu, monsieur.*"

LE CARBENNE executed a formal salute, swung on his heel and strode from the chamber. As he came into the reception room his eyes fell upon Otho. A fire flashed from their depths, the waxen expression quickened into animation. Le Carbenne stopped suddenly, searching Otho's face and uniform with a puzzled expression, and seemed on the point of speaking. Then he drew himself together and left the room. A staff officer summoned Otho. He dismissed the incident of Le Carbenne and steeled himself for the Corsican's presence.

"You have been waiting for some moments, Lieutenant Le Falcon," Bonaparte greeted him. "You have heard all that has been said?"

"It was impossible not to hear, Citizen First Consul," replied Otho.

"Then I need be very brief in filling in the details," replied the Corsican. "Shortly I in all likelihood shall have good need of your services, Le Falcon. In preparation for that moment you shall study the maps of Italy until you know every road, trail and pass. My aide-de-camp will make available to you the necessary maps, and a tutor who will explain their meaning in war. Your tutor will also impart to you a smattering of military education, so that you will know light cavalry from heavy artillery. You will be prepared to leave Paris on short notice at such time as I may need you. A glorious opportunity is close at hand. See to it that your lips are sealed. If there are any questions, present them to one of my staff. That is all, monsieur."

Otho left the room without being called upon to speak. The Corsican's manner had been direct and official. Those level eyes had not seemed to search him today. Bonaparte had accepted him at last as a mere cog in his engines of destruction. Otho contained himself with an effort as he passed into the corridor. His every suspicion had been confirmed. The Army of Reserve was not a myth. Dijon was merely a cloak, the troops there a sham to fool the Austrian secret service. It was not the frontier that was to be reenforced. Bonaparte had fixed his designs upon Italy, scene of his first great martial triumphs over the Austrian armies.

These thoughts flashed swiftly through Otho's mind and steeled him to action. There was, indeed, no time to lose. Even though the Austrian armies held Italy in a secure grip, there was no telling what havoc might be wrought by the mad genius of the Corsican. A courier must be sent now to Vienna with the warning. The Aulic Council must have the news and be ready against the omen, for there was always the danger that Bonaparte, by another miracle, might survive.

General Berthier's aide, in waiting in an outer corridor, broke in upon him.

"A message for you, Le Falcon," said the aide. "Lieutenant Le Carbenne

wishes that you report to him tonight at nine." The aide reduced his voice to a whisper. "The address it is most secret—the ninth house to the left of the Rue Chantilly."

"I am fully occupied, Citizen Captain, by the instructions of the First Consul," Otho replied sharply. "Is it required that I answer the calls of junior lieutenants?"

The captain shrugged.

"It is for you to say, my Lieutenant," he replied indifferently. "But Le Carbenne, a man who rarely loosens his tongue, was much concerned that I insist, saying it was a matter of the greatest concern—in fact one of life and death, Le Falcon."

"In that event," Otho replied, "I will consider the matter."

The face of Le Carbenne persisted, even against the urge of more serious business. There had been something vaguely familiar about the mysterious young Hussar. Otho searched his memory, but to no avail. A matter of life and death? The aide's words haunted him. The Hussar had just returned from Italy. He had studied the Austrian position, possibly mingled with the Austrian forces. A spy, perhaps.

He looked again at his watch and estimated the situation. It was a few minutes after eight o'clock. Roget would not be leaving for his wonted recess until after ten o'clock, judging by his recent practise. Otho reminded himself that this was not a time for dallying. Tonight might be the night of all nights to strike. Everything was set and waited but the spark of opportunity, a spark that would change the whole course of events in Europe. But was there not ample time to answer the strange summons from Le Carbenne?

Otho increased his step in sudden decision. There might be importance in meeting the Hussar, something that might cast light upon his mission. He sought out a cabriolet, drove rapidly across Paris, left the vehicle waiting at a dark intersection near his destination and sought out the billet of Le Carbenne on the Rue Chantilly.

CHAPTER XIX

LE CARBENNE

A WADDLING French maid answered Otho's rap and showed him into a faded salon. Le Carbenne entered punctually, his face that same placid waxed mask, but with a quizzical look in his eyes as he fixed them upon Otho. The little Hussar wore the faded uniform in which he had reported at the Luxembourg and his boots were unpolished. He sat down very deliberately without removing his eyes from Otho and crossed his knees awkwardly.

"I wish to ask you a question, monsieur," Le Carbenne began bluntly. "Have you in your heart taken allegiance to the First Consul?"

"An unusual question, Le Carbenne," Otho responded icily. "What right or reason have you for your words?"

Le Carbenne's eyes sparkled.

"Ah, the sound of your voice leaves me on safe ground," he replied. Le Carbenne folded his arms and leaned forward. "What word have you, my dear Otho of Donau-Walden, from our friends in Vienna?"

Otho started at the unexpected charge, but instantly recovered himself. He leaned back in his chair and met the Hussar's gaze with level eyes.

"You speak in parables, Le Carbenne," he replied dryly. "I was given to understand that you wished to see me on a matter of some importance. My time is precious, so please come to your point, if you have one."

"Splendid, Count Otho, splendidly done!" exclaimed Le Carbenne. "Your words answer my question fully. You are still, I perceive, a trusting agent of his Imperial Majesty, the Emperor, and tool of Colonel Vekuss. Please not to deny as much. It will do no good."

Otho rose and bowed stiffly. His hand went instinctively to the pistol under his waistcoat.

"Evidently monsieur has been touched by the fatigue," Otho retorted ironically.

"If it is for such nonsense you sent for me, I must excuse myself."

The Hussar laughed, a shrill treble of mirth in which there was a mocking tone.

"Please to be seated, Count Otho," he cried, "and do not concern yourself with your pistol. I am not armed, and you will realize that had I wished to trap you, it would have been so very simple at the Tuileries this afternoon. Will you continue to deny that you are Otho of Donau-Walden, agent of the Imperial secret service of the Aulic Council!"

"Why should I deny any fancy you choose to project?" Otho parried. He sat down reluctantly. "Curiosity prompts me to hear what else you have to charge."

Le Carbenne filled two glasses with red wine and passed one to his uneasy guest.

"If you are not Count Otho," Le Carbenne resumed presently, "you will indeed be amused by what I have to tell you. If you are Count Otho, perhaps you will lose something of your perfect composure when I have finished, monsieur. But first, so that what I say may not lack conviction, let me present myself."

Le Carbenne rose, stepped to the mantel, stripped away the wispy black mustache, arranged his long jet hair with a deft movement and drew on a velvet dressing gown over the faded Hussar uniform.

Otho sprang to his feet at the transition. Recognition struck him with the force of a whip.

"It was very stupid of me not to recognize you before, Fräulein Teschen," he said quietly. "Your face awakened a memory—but I was hardly expecting an Austrian woman to be masquerading as a French Hussar."

"But I have forgotten that I am a woman, monsieur. I lead a man's life, I take a man's chances. I am a French Hussar indeed—and I have had the compliment that I am worth a whole regiment of ordinary Horse!"

There was both pride and defiance in her words as she said this. Otho saluted, his eyes warm with admiration at her spirit.

"In the service of the emperor!" he exclaimed.

"As to that, monsieur," she rejoined, "you may judge for yourself when you have heard what I have to say. You will recall that I sent you a note of warning that day you were awaiting at the Palace upon the Colonel Vekuss."

"Yes, I was grateful, yet I did not understand—"

"You were very indiscreet. You tore the note to shreds and left them where they were found and pieced together. My life was the forfeit for that act, monsieur!"

"I—I hardly understand." Otho was scarlet in his confusion. "My last thought would be to leave you in jeopardy. But I thought you were a great favorite in the secret service, my dear Fräulein."

"A pawn!" she sneered. "A puppet. A checker to be moved or sacrificed in the intrigue that masters the throne, that engulfs Vienna, that throttles Austria! I would be dead now except that the officer who was charged with my death chose to forge a false report of my execution. But no glory to him. He claimed his price. There is always a price now in Vienna. A price for life and death, a price for poor Hungary, for the Netherlands, for Lombardy—for everything."

"Fräulein Teschen, do you realize what you are saying?" Otho cut in sharply. "Such words are—they are treason to the crown!"

"Yes, there was even a price for your life, monsieur!" she cried. "A great price—and the black rascals have collected it in full by now. You live only by a miracle of mischance, monsieur."

"You have been poisoned by foul gossip if you think that, Fräulein Teschen. The report of my death was made with my knowledge and assent. It was necessary to the success of my mission."

"So, you are still blind to all that, monsieur? You have not suspected that the Major Moskolz himself was commanded to uncover you to the French guillotine? You did not know that your estates were forfeit, that Ferdinand is now the Count of Donau-Walden, that

you have been picked clean—and for no better reason than that French blood flows in your veins!"

"What are you saying?" gasped Otho.

HIS eyes were staring, his jaws fell apart, his face a greenish pallor at the woman's words. The mention of Moskolz' treachery struck home. It instantly galvanized a flood of dormant suspicions.

"The Countess Zita?" he asked in a whisper. "My cousin Ferdinand? My estates in Lombardy—Vekuss—Baron Thugutt?" Suspicions that had haunted him through long months, that he had forced back each time they presented their sinister heads, rushed into the open. He rallied, in a last hope, against them, and voiced an admonition, "Guard your tongue, Fräulein Teschen! Tell me nothing that you do not swear for fact."

The woman rose to pace the salon under the lash of her emotions. Otho sat looking at her, hopelessly, wracked by fear, and waited until she chose to speak. Presently she sat down, close in front of him, her face grave and determined.

"I will tell you only what I know to be true," she vowed.

Fräulein Teschen spoke in a low, vibrant tone, her words coming rapidly as if to have done with her statement as quickly as possible. Otho weighed her charges at first, clinging to a slender thread of hope that it was all some horrible hoax of malice. But as she spoke on, the truth of what she said sank deep.

In the hour that followed, Otho heard unfolded in all its cruel details, the black treachery that had been brewed in the very shadow of the imperial palace to strip him to the bone. The rascals played for great stakes, for the millions of florins of the great estates of Donau-Walden in Lombardy, the Tyrol and Vienna. To pluck this richest of prizes they had not hesitated to destroy Count Otho body and soul, the hideous octopus of intrigue shaping its movements to strip him of property, wealth, titles, his Hungarian countess and, in order to achieve their sinister goal, his life and honor.

The plot had brewed in the cunning mind of Vekuss himself and inflamed the greedy Baron Ferdinand to a willing and necessary rôle of accessory and handy man. The ill-starred Russian, Perov, had been merely a witless pawn, a victim of the Black Cabinet's intrigue. And they had dared everything because of Otho's French blood, because of his sympathy for the luckless Lafayette. They had used that pretext to inflame the mind of the young emperor, a weakling in the hands of conscienceless plotters, the Black Cabinet. The Baron Thugutt had winked at the whole affair.

Thugutt's hatred of the French fed his willingness to see his faithful carrion gorge themselves, if not, indeed, a definite understanding as to his full share of the fat spoils. And his unspoken approval, his convenient blindness to what was going on, tied the active vultures of his Black Cabinet closer in loyalty for his own designs in other directions.

Zita herself was only a pawn, but a willing one. Flattery, gems, preference at court had turned her head. The handsome Russian had been set to bait her. Ferdinand had made the opportunities for Perov. Even the duel was planned. Lest Perov prove no match for Otho with pistol or saber, the obedient Captain Kurz had been sent to the field of honor, his orders to protect the life of the Czar Paul's emissary at Vienna if the fight went badly for Perov.

When Kurz fell, Vekuss devised the plan of sending Otho to Paris. This was decided upon as preferable to a trial by court-martial, which might incite suspicions at court. Once Otho was in Paris, they were to have him betrayed by Moskolz to the French secret police. That the French might not lack for evidence, his betrayal was fixed at an hour when he had in his possession an order in code under the seal of Vekuss' own service, a document that would whet the greed of the French guillotine.

Report from Moskolz of Otho's death

would then be the signal for the final plucking. The report to the emperor would show that Otho had fled from Vienna after murdering Perov in a jealous rage, and had been taken by the French for treason and executed. Since he died without heir, his title and estates would go, by recommendation of Thugutt, to the loyal Ferdinand, Otho's cousin, whose veins were untainted by French blood and whose loyalty to the crown could never be brought in question. Ferdinand was to marry Zita, who had flown into a rage at hearing of Otho's flight from Austria. Ferdinand was then to discard Zita to Vekuss, the chief reward the latter demanded out of the black net he had spread, and was to have ceded to him a portion of the estates in reconquered Lombardy that he would have transferred back to the house of Donau-Walden.

Only on one small detail had the plotters tripped themselves. Ferdinand's part meant that he must toss aside Fräulein Teschen. She confessed shamelessly that her notes to Otho had been those of a woman spurned. She had been fighting the intrigue from cover in a desperate play against losing Ferdinand. The piecing together of that last warning to Otho had unmasked her to the wily Vekuss and her death had been ordered without trial. Fräulein Teschen had managed her escape to France and found refuge in the masquerade of a man, a rôle not new to her since her days with the Austrian secret service in Italy. When Bonaparte seized the French government at St. Cloud, she had gone to him, told her story secretly in the utmost confidence and been accepted promptly by the Corsican for his own secret forces. Bonaparte alone knew her story. To all others she was M. Le Carbenne, subaltern of Hussars.

"So now you have heard, Count Otho," Fräulein Teschen exclaimed, springing suddenly to her feet and standing before him with flaming eyes. "You have heard how moves the Black Cabinet that holds Austria in its twisted talons. There is another who can tell you more. It will interest you to call upon the Corporal Pierre Hom, of the Fourth Company of the Consular Guard. Monsieur Hom will be even more startled than I that you are not already dead of Austrian treachery. But I have said enough."

Otho sat without looking at her. His jaws were firm again, his eyes straight ahead of him and filled with a strange, cold light. The color had returned to his face, a dull, heavy red. His arms were folded lightly across his chest. He did not speak. Fräulein Teschen filled her own glass with wine. Otho's remained untouched. She lifted her glass.

"Now, monsieur, you will join me!" she cried. "Death to the Black Cabinet! *Vive la république! Vive Bonaparte!*"

Otho stood up. He ignored the wine, and bowed.

"I am grateful to you for what you have told me," he said quietly. "You have my vow that I will respect your confidence, Fräulein Teschen."

"Fräulein Teschen!" she cried contemptuously. "Please that you never speak that name again. The Black Cabinet destroyed Fräulein Teschen. I am Monsieur Le Carbenne, a loyal Hussar of France, Count Otho."

Slowly a taut smile formed on his bloodless lips, an inscrutable gleam crept into his eyes.

"You address me as Count Otho, yet you tell me Count Otho is dead," he said in a low, strangely sardonic voice. The fire in his eyes deepened, his very being seemed to undergo a subtle transformation. The smile parted across his teeth. "Then let us permit his ashes to repose in peace, my friend. One man came at your call tonight, Monsieur Le Carbenne. Another bids you adieu. I am Monsieur Le Falcon, a loyal Hussar of France!"

CHAPTER XX

THE IMPERIAL SEAL

AS HE left Le Carbenne's billet and emerged into the black darkness of Rue Chantilly, Otho's mind was clear, his step firm and ready. He wondered at his own self-possession, at

the response of his faculties to the crushing disclosures of Fräulein Teschen. It was as if a heavy veil had been stripped from his vision. The misery of a grim reality weighed less oppressively than those flitting shadows of suspicion and intuition that had haunted him since he left Vienna.

A harsh laugh escaped his lips as he walked. He was laughing at that blind fool, Count Otho. The Black Cabinet of Vienna had claimed his unquestioned loyalty and, even while stripping him, had enlisted him in the work of his own destruction. Zita? Why had he blinded himself to that fluttering butterfly whose one shallow thought had been of royal favor? As to Vekuss and his treacherous cousin Ferdinand, there was no shock in the truth of these creatures, nor of the wily Thugutt. It seemed to him now that he had always known these things. Only the veil of his own stupidity, the blind habit of fealty to the crown, had obscured the truth.

But his mind quickly turned from these thoughts. It was as if he had thought upon them too often and was surfeited with their bitterness. He went to the awaiting cabriolet and dismissed it. At a swinging stride he plunged back across the Seine and into the heart of Paris. He took direction intuitively, without conscious thought or plan on his own part. His steps brought him in the course of an hour at his rendezvous with Major Moskolz.

He mounted the steps of a dingy hotel in which Moskolz was waiting. It was close to midnight. Moskolz must have abandoned, with a gasp of relief, any thought of the attempt on Bonaparte's life tonight. Otho found Moskolz sprawled on a bed, still in the disguise of Roget, the Corsican's chef. At sight of Otho, the Hungarian agent floundered to his feet, his face ashen as he waited for Otho to speak.

"It is late, Count Otho, late—nearly midnight," said Moskolz in a feverish whisper. "You do not propose the risk at —at this hour?"

"Comfort yourself, Herr Major," said Otho. "Circumstances do not favor the First Consul's death tonight. I have come on entirely another errand."

Moskolz plopped into a chair and his heavy face brightened.

"A great disappointment, Count Otho. I have been waiting in high hopes of preparing our omelette at last." The Hungarian's nimble wits sensed Otho's changed aspect. "Come, your face tells me there is something in the wind. You do not mean things have gone wrong with our plans?"

Otho forced the shadow of a smile.

"Things are not exactly as we had planned them, dear Major. I am forced to change the scheme of things. One of the Corsican's loyal retainers has become suspicious. It is for his wants to be attended to first of all."

"We are suspected?" Moskolz was on his feet, his face purple, the thick veins welling on neck and forehead. "The French police have smelled a mouse?"

"Not the French police, dear Major. But do not concern yourself. Do as I tell you, and you will have your fair opportunity to clear the trail."

"You speak in parables tonight, Count Otho. Come, speak up. This is too important—"

"You must learn patience, dear Major. Patience, as I have had to learn it. Besides, this is not a place to talk deep secrets. Meet me in the morning, promptly at daylight, a hundred meters along the first roadway leading south through the Bois de Boulogne. I will then explain everything."

"But in the morning—so many hours from now—it may be too late, Count Otho! Let us secure a vehicle and drive to Le Montier's."

"It will be time enough in the morning," Otho said evasively. "You will understand my reasons fully, when I have told you all. But do not fail to meet me in the morning, Herr Major, as you count yourself loyal to the service of his Majesty, the Emperor."

Moskolz clutched Otho's arm with anxious fingers, as Otho turned from the

room, and made a final plea. Time was precious, he whined. If, perchance, the French police had the scent, no moment should be lost in going to cover.

"In the morning," Otho repeated with finality, "and until then you have my word for it that you are free to sleep in perfect security."

OTHO proceeded on foot through Paris. He had no thought of returning to his billet. It would not be daylight until soon after five o'clock. But there was a surge of energy in his sinews that drove away any thought of sleep. He needed to walk, endlessly, at a swinging gait. By one o'clock he had reached the Bois de Boulogne. He spent an hour circling through the tangled small forest, then walked back into the city. At three o'clock he passed the Tuileries. Through a slender rift in drawn portières he caught the flicker of lamplight. Carriages were waiting outside, their drivers asleep. The Corsican was still at his work. A man of steel, the Corsican. Rumor had it that Bonaparte never slept. Day and night he wove his plans, wrestled with his titantic skein. There was bankrupt France to be revived, commerce to be established, ships to be floated, armies to be trained, equipped and marshaled, laws to be projected, revised endlessly; and through it all querulous factions to be appeased or routed.

The gendarmes stopped Otho from time to time on the dimly lighted streets, examined his face under dark lanterns, checked his orders, and turned on their rounds with profuse apologies. He remembered that a few months before it would have cost his life to go about the streets of Paris thus. His throat would have been cut, or a poniard thrust in his back for the few sous he might have on his person. Fouche's police had learned their duty since the coming to authority of Napoleon. The streets of Paris now were a safe place at any hour.

As the hour of dawn approached he circled to the woods and posted himself a hundred meters back on the appointed carriage road behind the entrance of the park. The sky was gray and overcast and there was an unusual chill in the air for April. As daylight crept through the trees he watched intently for the first sight of Moskolz' carriage. No sound of crunching wheels had caught his ear by the appointed hour. But a shadow through the trees betrayed a wayfarer on foot. It was the cautious Hungarian, reconnoitering in broad circles like a jackal. At seeing Otho was there and alone, Moskolz strode bravely forward.

"The French gendarmes, they gave me a chill," fretted Moskolz. "A dozen times I was called upon for my identification. It is folly to be meeting at such an hour as this, Count Otho, and at such a place."

"An excellent place for the business at hand, Major Moskolz," said Otho cryptically. "Come, let us waste no time."

He led the way along a bridle path to a broad, grassy opening among the beech trees, halted and threw aside his cape.

"You are armed, Herr Major?" he demanded.

"Yes, of course." The major's eyes flashed alarm and perplexity. "But is there danger? I do not understand all this mysterious conduct, Count Otho."

"Then I will explain, Herr Major," said Otho, fixing the Hungarian with level, accusing eyes. "I have brought you here to demand satisfaction. Prepare to defend yourself!"

Otho brought forth one of his own dueling pistols and examined the flint mechanism critically. Moskolz stood glued to the ground, gaping impotently.

"What—what jest is this?" he blurted. "Have you lost your reason, Count Otho?"

"On the contrary, I have found it."

"But this—this is impossible," Moskolz protested. "If I have given offense unwittingly, let me make amends. Come, what code have I offended?"

"There is no code low enough to list your conduct, Major Moskolz. I would be fully justified in paying you off in your

own coin by delivering you to Fouche. But I can not permit the guillotine to cheat me of your life, and since I am not a cowardly assassin, I will kill you in fair battle."

Moskolz caught hold of himself. He saw that Otho was in deadly earnest. His eyes shifted rapidly, while his brain raced in search of some loophole. He forced an expression of outraged innocence.

"My dear Count," he pleaded. "You do me great wrong. You are the victim of some treacherous and conniving rascal. Do not accept—"

"You have spoken the truth, Herr Moskolz!" Otho broke in. "I am the victim of not one but several treacherous rascals —you, the Colonel Vekuss, my own sweet cousin Ferdinand, and Baron Thugutt. But I am not the witless victim I have been taken for. One by one, you shall make full amends to me—and you come first of all, my dear Major!"

The Hungarian's faculties were now aroused. He estimated the danger fully, and launched a final blunt evasion.

"Another time, then," he said in the bark of command. "In the emperor's name, I command you to desist until his Imperial Majesty's business has been attended to. If you do not hear me, I shall cite you for treason, Count Otho."

"You forget that Count Otho is listed among the dead—a victim of foul treachery. It is with Monsieur Le Falcon, an officer of the French Hussars, you have to deal, Herr Major. For the last time, prepare to defend yourself!"

"As the one challenged I claim my rights," cried Moskolz, desperately. "If I must give you satisfaction, let it be with the sabers."

"Sabers are more to my liking, Herr Major. But it was not discreet to come here at such an hour with sabers, nor will my patience with you permit delay. At twenty paces, each of us to fire as the left foot falls into place at the tenth pace. Are you ready?"

Moskolz drew his weapon, a French Charleville of .75 caliber. He glanced hastily at the mechanism, and nervously eyed his antagonist. Otho read the treachery in his eyes.

"See to it that you do not attempt to fire before the proper moment," he cautioned. "I shall allow you no such advantage. In place, with the right foot—march!"

The two men moved slowly backward, facing each other. Otho took measured steps of twenty-five inches. Moskolz stretched his legs back into three-foot strides in order to gain distance, counting upon an advantage of his heavy caliber over Otho's smaller Belgian weapon.

"One—two—three—four—five—"

Otho counted off the steps in a firm, vibrant voice. He was as cool and collected as an automaton, in the fullest possession of every faculty. Moskolz was visibly unsteady. His heavy head was thrust forward, his face ashen, his beady eyes searching Otho avidly for some chance at a premature shot. But Otho's easy assurance, his level, alert eye and steady hand, disconcerted treachery.

At the count of ten, Moskolz whipped his pistol into line while his legs were yet astride. Otho raised his weapon and aimed. A spurt of flame leaped from the Hungarian's pistol. Moskolz dropped the weapon and snatched at a second pistol under his waistcoat. Otho, untouched, aimed carefully. The Hungarian, breaking position, bent double to cover his heart and weaved rapidly while playing for a second shot. Otho fired with cool deliberation. Moskolz, with a shrill scream, plunged to the sod head foremost, threshed about convulsively and then stiffened, a Belgian bullet through his skull. Otho stooped to strip from the Hungarian's finger a large garnet ring. Under the garnet setting of that ring was the delicately wrought seal of the Imperial secret service.

Otho detached the signet and gazed at the seal with a whimsical smile.

"An excellent weapon, my dear Colonel Vekuss," he mused ironically. "An excellent weapon in the hands of Monsieur Le Falcon!"

CHAPTER XXI

CORPORAL HOM

ITALY was a familiar realm to Otho. Though, as a special aide-de-camp to an ancient Austrian general, he had heard the battles only in the distant, fretful rumble of artillery, he had followed breathlessly at headquarters every movement of human chess on the Austrian maps in those first fateful battles against the Corsican. So he knew the vital roads and trails that commanded the prizes of Genoa, of Alessandria and Milan; the strategic passes, the key positions of Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany and the Roman states. He knew, too, from long travel, the tortuous routes of information and supply that connected Vienna, by slender threads, with the armies in the field.

On reaching the Tuileries, he found awaiting him the familiar face of Lieutenant Fullois. The Frenchman greeted him with jovial raillery.

"You laughed at the Army of the Reserve when we went to Dijon, Monsieur Le Falcon," Fullois scoffed. "Ho, but now that I am to show you everything, you may laugh in fact—out of the fullness of your heart, monsieur. There is great joy in the making, an adventure that pales our insignificant jaunt to Dijon. Soon you shall hear the music of the gods; the reeds of the steel, the treble of musketry and the rich basso of the great guns. But first I am instructed to lead you by the hand, *mon enfant*. Here, you must learn your maps!"

Fullois unfolded Bonaparte's great maps of Italy, Switzerland and France, spread them on the floor and dropped down across them. He motioned Otho on the floor beside him.

"Here is the real Army of Reserve," he gloated. "Twenty thousand men at Chalons-sur-Marne, another twenty thousand at Lyons and, in the center, clustered about Dijon, another eight thousand. And here is that Austrian dummox Melas advancing with sixty thousand men on Massena at Genoa and the Var, while he has another thirty thousand scattered about Italy."

Otho puzzled over Fullois' jubilant assertions.

"But will not Melas be able to crush Massena by his superior numbers at Genoa before the Army of Reserve can reenforce him?" Otho put in, recalling Le Carbenne's report to the First Consul.

Fullois sobered as he thought for a moment with knitted brows upon this situation. Then he shrugged the question aside and his face brightened.

"But Melas does not command Frenchmen, monsieur!" he boasted. "And his Austrians are not led by General Bonaparte. Have no fear at what the maps show, my friend. We shall see some miracles of strategy when our Little Corporal takes the field."

Otho studied the chessboard with heavy features. Fullois' ready explanation, despite its easy enthusiasm, was not convincing. Melas held Italy in the palm of his hand. He was firmly established in Alessandria. His forces held Milan and Turin and guarded the passes through the towering Alps at Splügen and St. Gothard. The Austrian Fort Bard blocked the pass at the Great St. Bernard to the west. Melas had ninety thousand troops, seasoned by long campaigning in Italy, adjusted to the country, fired by long success against the French. Melas was even now moving a crushing force of sixty thousand men on to the west to crush Massena's twenty-five thousand Frenchmen. Massena, at best, could only hold out a few weeks and this by shutting himself up under siege at Genoa whence he would be unable to retreat.

Moreau, guarding the Franco-Swiss frontiers against Kray's threatened invasion, would not dare turn his attention to Italy. So Melas had the jump, the obvious advantage. By the time the Army of Reserve could muster in Massena's rear to reenforce him, it would be too late. Massena's last Frenchman would be dead or prisoner. Even the

tactical miracles of the Corsican could not overcome such handicaps, much less with an army of conscripts such as Otho had seen at Dijon.

But he spoke no word of these thoughts. Fullois had refuge in his belief in French superiority, in a blind confidence in his general. So he was not fretting himself with the difficulties ahead. Fullois continued to point out strategic points on the great maps, the route from Lyon and Grenoble across the Alps at Mt. Cenis into Turin, which would leave a second crossing of the high range necessary to a support of Massena at Genoa; the route from Geneva and Martigny, through the valley of the Rhone to the St. Bernard or the Simplon; the route from Villeneuve on Lake Geneva to the St. Gothard or across the Rhine to the Splügen, all of which would leave Bonaparte far removed from the army of Melas in its design to crush Massena at Genoa on the English-ridden Gulf of Genoa.

"Please to understand, Le Falcon," explained Fullois, "you must know all these positions for a purpose. When the Army of Reserve strikes, it will move from cover, and gather behind a curtain of mystery ready to strike. I am to maintain, for the First Consul, the position and movement of every battalion until we are ready to attack. You are to assist me in this, though the great heaven knows I require no assistant for such a task. But General Berthier says it is the First Consul's command, and so to assist me you will. Ho, but I shall not be at this silly pastime a great time. I have another pledge, a promise from the lips of the First Consul, monsieur!" Fullois climbed to his feet in his fervor and slapped himself joyously on the thigh. "When the army moves into battle, I am to join Lannes or Murat. Two great generals, monsieur, whose service leaves one certain of a great share in the fighting. Perhaps that is the reason I have an understudy to take my place with these maps when I have gone into the lines as a man of war."

Fullois' explanation of Otho's duties did not dispel the riddle of his assignment. He sensed that the Corsican had some ulterior purpose in the back of his mind. But since he could not fathom it, he put the puzzle aside. Circumstances must develop in their own way. In the meantime, he would throw himself into his work. French tables of organization, equipment, weapons, minor tactics, suddenly had seized upon his interest. He plied Fullois with many technical questions. His tutor, complimenting him upon the ready facility in which he mastered the maps, turned to the French tactics.

THE art of war was in a state of flux, he explained. The old tactics were beginning to go to the discard. Only the Austrians clung to the heavy assaults in frontal masses, depending upon an iron discipline to sling their battalions in solid formation upon the enemy and beat him by heavy slugging. Bonaparte had showed the fallacy of this in Italy already by his light maneuver, his wide encircling movements with his light and heavy cavalry, his efforts to stimulate a high morale among his troops rather than the iron fisted discipline of cat-o'-nine-tails. He preferred to strike in flank and rear, thrusting his massed reserves at one weak but vital point in the enemy position, smash opposing formations and defeat his shattered foemen in detail.

The verdict of Vienna upon Bonaparte's tactics returned to Otho's mind. A shallow box of tricks, the capers of a military mountebank, august members of the Aulic Council had pronounced the Corsican's battle technique. Only troops that were poorly led and weak of discipline could be upset by such trickery. Such innovations were unworthy of the Austrian arms. The old, solid methods were the thing to count in the long run. Upstarts might gain momentary advantage by supplanting sound discipline with frothy morale. But a loose comradeship which permitted officers to fraternize with soldiers could never sup-

plant the need of an iron discipline.

Austria must depend upon that iron discipline, a discipline of the lash for minor infractions and of death for such felonies as breaking ranks. Soldiers must fear their leaders more than they feared the enemy. Austria had been made mighty on that solid theory. The Austrian arms had built its glorious traditions upon disciplined massed battalions that marched in close formation against lead and cannister to crush the enemy with unyielding walls of human flesh.

The effervescent Fullois wearied in midday of his map baiting. He announced, with a shrug of contempt, that he was not meant for a staff job. So, he had other matters to occupy him for the afternoon, principally the quest of a fine set of Versailles pistols.

"There is no saying when we may find ourselves shuttled out of Paris for the battlefield, monsieur," he exclaimed. "For my part, I wish to be armed with something better than those Charleville horse pistols. I would caution you to do likewise, my friend. Until the morning, then, *au revoir!*"

Otho seized the respite gratefully. There was unfinished business to be cared for, growing out of the duel with Moskolz. Before reporting at the Tuileries, he had managed a message to the prefect of police, reporting a trifling political quarrel that had resulted in the death of an itinerant wretch who dared slander the First Consul to an officer of the Guards. With that message, Otho had enclosed a note of twenty francs, barely enough to cover the cost of a hurried burial in a nameless grave. Thus the disappearance of Moskolz would be complete, and without record.

He went to his billet from the Tuileries. Vekuss and Ferdinand must be left leaning upon their henchman Moskolz for the time being. Otho worked out a cryptic message in the secret code for delivery at Vienna by courier.

I have been forced into my hole. Have no uneasiness. Success will crown the righteous.

He applied, by use of Moskolz' ring, the secret seal of authenticity to the message. And since the block symbols of the code would appear the same in any hand, that seal would leave no doubt in Vekuss' mind. Otho's eyes sparkled at the words he had set down. They told only the truth, yet Vekuss would construe them, logically enough, to his own purpose, once the message reached his eyes.

Since he had no taste for the precious rascals at Le Montier's, Otho enclosed the courier message in a plain envelop and sent it by messenger addressed through Le Montier to Ferdinand. Thence it would be hurried by courier to Ferdinand, if he was not in Paris, and finally into the hands of Vekuss. He sent a copy of the message in ordinary French, addressed to Le Montier, using lemon juice pigment which that French tool of his cousin's could develop with an application to the heat. Le Montier would rave at being left thus in the dark by Moskolz, and at the very moment when he must be pacing his apartment waiting word of the Corsican's assassination. But Le Montier, too, would be thrown off his guard by the seal of Moskolz, and he would send the code message on in a hurry. For the time being, Otho held no quarrel with Le Montier. The fellow must not be molested. He, just now, was the one means of contact with Vienna—and Otho had other messages to send.

As soon as the missive was on its way to Le Montier, Otho set out for the barracks of the Consular Guard. There had recurred in his mind many times since last night the words of Le Carbenne. Who was the mysterious Corporal Hom? What possible information could a corporal of the French ranks have of his affairs and misfortunes? The Consular Guard, under the Corsican, was no ordinary force. It was a sort of *corps d'élite*, only the most carefully selected men admitted to its ranks. Therefore Corporal Hom would be no ordinary conscript or adventurer.

On arriving at the casern of the Consular Guards, Otho was amazed to find

that, in place of the battalion he had expected to find, the force had grown into a small army in itself. The Corsican had multiplied the battalion of St. Cloud days into many battalions, a veritable fighting corps. Likewise he found that the mysterious Corporal Hom was hedged in by unusual precautions. The immediate company commander referred Otho to the chief of battalion, who asked many questions despite Otho's uniform of the Hussars. Finally the battalion commander, admonishing Otho that the corporal must not be detained very long, dispatched an orderly.

THE gray shadows of dusk were in the casern guardroom where Otho waited when the corporal, in dress uniform, entered, a puzzled look on his lean, somber face. Otho sprang from his seat, an exclamation of joyous recognition on his lips, as he caught the fellow's features. It was Plobo, his own faithful Plobo, by a miracle in France!

"Corporal Hom, I salute you!" cried Otho, advancing to meet Plobo. "Of all men whom I wished to see—you are the most welcome!"

Plobo, struck dumb by the apparition before him, stood, a gaping mannikin of ghastly pallor and stark eyes. He stood several moments before animation returned, then began a blinking search of Otho's face and figure, as if seeking to confirm Otho's actual existence by some intimate mark or token. As Plobo put out a hesitant hand Otho stepped forward and laid his hand on the corporal's shoulders.

"I am not a ghost, Plobo." He laughed. "It is I, in the flesh, and very much alive."

"But they did not shoot you, Highness?" gasped Plobo, his face convulsed by conflicting emotions. "Did they not shoot you in the wooded courtyard behind the palace—even after I had told them the truth of the Captain Kurz?"

Otho's face darkened. Plobo's words disclosed some new ramification of Vekuss' black mischief.

"You must see that the rogues tricked you, Plobo, with any story of my death," Otho reassured. "But what was it you told them of Captain Kurz?"

"The truth, Highness. That it was I who killed him," muttered Plobo.

"So? You forgot that I claimed full responsibility for my fight with Kurz and the Russian?" Otho rejoined severely. "But how did they come to question you of that affair?"

"Oh, but I did not intend to talk, Highness," cried Plobo. "Through two hours I held my tongue though I was strung by the thumbs until the pain of my fresh wound goaded me to madness. They held wine to my lips and offered my liberty with a thousand florins if I would but confess it was you who killed Kurz with a knife in his throat. When I would not speak, they told me my silence confirmed everything, that you would die on the gallows for murder. Then it was I spoke, Highness! I signaled with the little strength I had left for them to let me to my feet. And when I was able to speak, I told only the truth—that it was me plunged the blade into the captain's neck. I even told them, Highness, of your rebuke for what I had done, and for my disobedience of your order."

Plobo paused. His face gathered into a glowering mask of hate. His arms trembled from the tension of his clenched hands.

"Then they tricked me, Highness. They laughed at me and said I lied. And when they could not guide my tongue by torture, they put their own words in my mouth and while I was too weak to move, forced my hand to ink the mark on their confession, words of the foulest slander—that it was you killed Kurz by hurling the knife in a fair duel."

"I perceive their design all too clearly," said Otho bitterly. "A fine document the rogues were extending for their slimy records! But you, Plobo, how did you manage to escape after that?"

"A strange miracle, Highness, which I do not understand. I was to die in the morning. At midnight, an officer of the

Guards kicked me awake and tossed me the uniform of a Russian soldier. He took my clothes, and when I had on the Russian's, took me by a dark gate to a carriage. Another was in the carriage, in Russian uniform. A lady, Highness, who had also been sentenced to die at sunrise. She said the unlucky Russians would wear our clothes for us when the sun came over the Danube. She did not tell me why. Oh, Highness, I was very sick at heart and had no wish to live. I was tormented by the thought that my disobedience had sent you under. The lady told me you had escaped to France, but you would soon be dead unless she could warn you in Paris. I paid no attention to her words. I thought she was trying to ease my sorrow, and I was sure you had been killed.

"The lady had friends who helped us toward the frontier, but twice we were stopped by patrols. We slipped the first one, Highness, but the second, I fought them—three of them—and killed two with pistols and the third with my dirk. Soon we were in France, and I had a new wish now to live. It was put in my thoughts by fräulein. It was to live for the day of revenge. Since then, fräulein has told me you were dead. I knew it all the time. Many things have happened in these months, of which I must not speak, Highness. But not for an hour have I forgotten that there is a day coming to me!"

Otho placed his hands back upon Plobo's shoulders.

"We are both here, then, by a miracle of good fortune, Plobo," he said. "But let us talk now of pleasanter things, since I have been warned not to hold you too long. You are willing to believe at last that it is I, in the flesh?"

"It's wonderful that it's really you, Highness."

"Do you not see that I am a lieutenant of the Hussars, you rascal? Please address me by my proper title hereafter."

"The uniform—it is not a disguise?" Plobo asked this with a sudden breathless interest. "You, too, have had your eyes opened, Highness?"

"I am Lieutenant Le Falcon. No one more, no one less; and attached to the staff for the moment of the general-in-chief of the Army of Reserve."

Plobo, mistaking the banter in Otho's voice, threw himself to attention.

"But it's very unlike the Austrian service, don't you think?" Otho went on. "For example, you may call and visit with me as a comrade at my billet. There are many things left for us to talk about."

"But I regret," replied Plobo painfully, "the Citizen Lieutenant must pardon me. It is impossible."

"Absurd, Corporal Hom! If you refuse, the Lieutenant will be at the inconvenience of calling here to see you."

"That, too, is impossible, my Lieutenant. I am leaving my company at once."

"Leaving? You mean that you have been transferred to another station?"

The corporal turned scarlet. He choked and spluttered in an effort to find words.

"But—but—that is secret, my Lieutenant. Your pardon—but I am not permitted to speak."

CHAPTER XXII

A MESSAGE TO VEKUSS

WITH May day came an unmistakable stiffening of tension at the Tuileries. High generals came in increasing number and no longer were required to cool their heels in the ante-chambers. The First Consul admitted them to his presence immediately, even though proud statesmen had to be shunted to one side by glib aides-de-camp.

Fullois' manner likewise confirmed that the pot was coming swiftly to a boil. His ardor rose to a high pitch, and though he stuck to his maps and station lists long hours each day, his mind was incessantly bubbling over past adventures and future glory.

Otho's spirit rose to the adventure. He was finding a new interest in his duties; in Paris, in France. A miracle of transformation was working itself out within him, impelled by the impulse of that

night's interview with Le Carbenne. The part of him that was Le Falcon relentlessly shut away the thoughts and attributes of that soft royalist, Count Otho. That misguided puppet of the Austrian crown, pawn of the Black Cabinet of Vienna, was dead within him. Le Falcon, son of a French mother, alone survived. Over and over he swore this to himself. Even the crowds of Paris had a changed aspect in his eyes. There was a certain music in their noisy blustering of "Liberty, equality, fraternity."

When the rabble hurled maledictions at crowned heads, there was a growing response of approval in Otho's heart. The right of freemen to a voice in their affairs, the dangers of autocrats with their shadowy whisperers and red intriguers, Otho saw these things through new eyes. Experience had stripped the veil from his vision and shown him the mainsprings of revolt.

Officers high in the confidence of the Corsican paused invariably, following their audience with Bonaparte, to inspect the great maps of France, Switzerland and Italy. There, meticulously posted in multicolored pins and strips of cardboard, they would find the scattered fragments of their corps and divisions. They would study these symbols soberly, make copious notes, ask a few terse questions of Fullois or Otho and stalk forth, their grim faces leavened by a strange light.

On the day that Generals Lannes and Murat came together, Fullois was struck dumb by their presence. A strange pair to be commanding great forces, Otho thought. In Austria an officer must have the frost of long years at his temples before rising to such powers. These generals were hardly old enough for the command of battalions. Lannes was a stubby man, as straight as an exclamation point and with a sharp, incisive bark of a voice. He glanced over the pins with a swift, impatient flash of his deep black eyes, and turned to Fullois with a brief inquiry as to the state of his health. Fullois, purple with confusion, blustered like a schoolboy in shaping his reply. The presence of the two officers completely overwhelmed him. Murat was a much larger man, somewhat younger, and cast in a finer mold. He looked the commander of Hussars with his fine, soldierly head and torso and his long, lithe limbs. His voice was soft spoken and his manner that of a courtier, though with something vaguely wanting.

Lieutenant Fullois' tongue returned to him the moment the generals left the room.

"There's two great soldiers, indeed, Le Falcon!" he exclaimed. "Two great soldiers—and I am to serve with one of them. Which? It does not matter, except that I have a preference for the Horse, and therefore the General Murat's cavalry. Ah, but there is a soldier of parts, Le Falcon. When he draws his saber and shouts the charge, it is a beautiful sight, my friend! The shouts of his horsemen drown the thunder of the hoofs as they ride straight into the enemy—and what army can stand up before Murat's blades! I tell you the best of them scatter.

"*P-s-st!*" Fullois dropped his voice and raised a waggish finger. "They said once he was a coward—that he lost the Little Corporal's favor in Egypt by pretending a wound when he was ordered to charge the sunbaked infidels at Aboukir. Ah, his stomach did crawl, monsieur, did crawl that day at Aboukir. But he took the lash of the Little Corporal's tongue, and it stung seven thousand devils alive in his bosom. Since then—*sacrebleu!*—but his courage knows no limit. The good Lord help the poor Austrians when Murat loosens himself upon them!

"As for the General Lannes, comrade—but what would the Little Corporal do without such men? A little man, you say. Yes, but a giant of courage. You must see him once in the thick of battle. Let me tell you of Lodi. His own men were slow at leaping upon the Austrians. Straight at the white coated Grenadiers rode Lannes. Alone, my friend, for even his staff was scattered on many errands. He flourished his saber and shouted to them to avaunt. A thousand Grenadiers, drawn up for battle, Le Falcon, and

our general attacks them alone! The sight froze them. Their ears were deaf to the commands of their officers.

"The few who leveled their fire upon him at a few meters were so shaken that their lead went wild. Straight on he rode, as straight as the path of a Charleville, and the Austrian ranks broke. He sabered them right and left as they fled, and had them broken when his own gallant men brought up with hot lead and cold bayonet to finish the job.

"That is the General Lannes, my comrade. There is but one man in all France his equal—yes, there is one man who perhaps surpasses him: the General Desaix. But Desaix, he is yet in Egypt. Yet any hour am I expecting to see his face, Le Falcon. The Little Corporal will have Desaix along when he goes to Italy—and Desaix will come even if he has to swim the Mediterranean. How well—"

FULLOIS broke off his sentence with a sharp gasp and snapped to attention. Otho turned to see the Corsican himself suddenly entering the room. The sensitive Fullois must have sensed the First Consul's presence, as his back had been to the door while he raved of Lannes and Murat. The Corsican's eyes were dark ringed, his pallor almost death-like, but his blue eyes glowed with a piercing luster that banished any hint of fatigue.

"Good afternoon, messieurs," he greeted the lieutenants pleasantly. "How goes it with the Army of Reserve?"

"Most excellent, my General," Fullois replied thickly. "The battalions are at strength and ready at an instant's order."

The Corsican ran his eyes over the dispositions, then dropped down to the floor and ran his fingers slowly back and forth across the charted mountain passes.

"Your pretty wax headed pins are out of date, messieurs," he announced as he rose, a mild smile on his face. "The order has just gone to Berthier. The Army of Reserve is on the move."

"We are finished with the maps, my General?" said Fullois, forgetting his awe in the flood of his excitement. "I am free, then. We are off for Italy?"

Bonaparte smiled broadly and gave Fullois' cheek a playful pinch.

"Not so impatient, my poor ninny," he rejoined. "You but move your maps to Martigny, whence you will lay them out at the convent of the Bernardins and chart my army as it moves under the Alps."

Fullois stiffened, swallowed hard and saluted.

"Your pardon, my General," he stammered.

"In the meantime, I wish to make an addition to your totals," said Bonaparte. "Credit the center, which has been at Dijon, with its full quota of twenty thousand men."

"My General, we have the report of muster from Dijon this very morning. Eight thousand men, and a footnote that arrangements have been made to receive no more," Fullois spoke up.

"Simpleton, do you question my word! Dijon reported correctly. But when their divisions reach Geneva, they will find their men waiting for them—trained men of whom they will be proud. So you may understand matters, I've had Carnot order Moreau to detach that number from his Army of the Rhine to fill out Berthier's Army of Reserve. They will be marching to the passes before the end of a week, and lucky to have such an opportunity."

"Lucky, indeed, sir," echoed Fullois. "To campaign six months in Italy will be more glorious than a lifetime on that wretched frontier."

"Six months!" The Corsican laughed heartily. "Six weeks in Italy should be more than enough for my purpose, messieurs. I can spare not more time away from Paris, and in that period I must have a great victory! But you shall see. I will devote less than a fortnight of my time to the crushing of that poor donkey, Melas. Why, I should lose everything to these carnivorous politicians were I to be gone as long as six months from their midst."

"But here is Melas, my General,"

Fullois volunteered, turning to the maps, "moving even west of Alessandria with sixty thousand men of all arms. The last courier reports the General Massena falling back stubbornly upon Genoa. I had reasoned that we must march far to get in front of the Austrians for battle, and we will find them swollen by conceit with their success."

"You are a brave soldier of France, Fullois," said Bonaparte indulgently. "I wish my ranks were stiffened by ten thousand such officers. The world would soon bend its knee to France in that event —though it is perhaps fortunate, my simpleton, that you do not plan the maneuvers."

"I am grateful to my General for his regard of my valor." Fullois bowed.

"And you, Le Falcon—" the Corsican suddenly turned his attention to Otho— "I sense a great change in you, a new enthusiasm for your duties. I was not mistaken that you have in you the qualities of a true soldier. That gives me a deep satisfaction, since I have duties of the highest importance in store for you. Nothing is more important than that the Austrians shall continue their stupid estimate of our purposes. They must think that I but reenforce Moreau on the frontier, or perhaps an expedition to relieve Massena at Genoa. They must believe that I am remaining in Paris. In that you will be of great help, and I will see to it also that you get your chance in the field."

"You are most gracious, my General," replied Otho, with none of Fullois' uneasiness in the presence of greatness. "I only trust that I may prove worthy of my General's confidence."

Bonaparte eyed him with a sharp, appraising look.

"You know, Le Falcon," he said abruptly, "I have often thought that there is a quality about you that you did not acquire of the theater. Good afternoon, messieurs."

Fullois, straining his ear to hear the First Consul's footsteps out of hearing, clapped his thigh joyously when the Corsican was gone.

"You heard it, you heard it, Le Falcon!" he exulted. "I have been fretted, my friend, but now my happiness is without limit. What if the General Berthier should command the Army of the Reserve in battle! A chief-of-staff, Berthier, my friend. Perhaps an excellent one. But when the General Bonaparte relieved him as the minister of war for the Army of Reserve, my heart was lead. Could it be that the Little Corporal was going to desert us for these politicians of Paris? Ah, Berthier would be merely a general, no better than a general of the Austrians, perhaps. For even the great Lannes and Murat—yes, even the General Desaix, are only men to follow orders. It is the Little Corporal who must plan. My friend, when the Little Corporal is present, there can be no defeat, for his brain is worth a dozen corps. There is no matching his maneuvers, and you heard his words, my Lieutenant, heard it from the lips of the little Corporal. He will go himself with the Army into Italy. Ho, but victory is ours already."

THERE was contagion in Fullois' enthusiasm. Otho had felt the fire kindling in his breast, gaining warmth day by day. The Corsican's words had stirred him with a new fervor. But they puzzled him, too, as he settled back over the maps with Fullois. The latest reports of couriers showed Melas more than ever the master of Italy. Massena was retreating with only rear guard resistance back against the Bay of Genoa. Was it not folly for the First Consul to think he could change all that in his vaunted six weeks, or in six or sixty fortnights for that matter? Even with the divisions he was taking away from Moreau, he would have only two-thirds the strength Melas boasted, sixty thousand men to pit against ninety thousand veteran Austrians.

But there was the wine of confidence in the Corsican's eyes, in his face, in his carriage. His very presence radiated confidence. A titanic gamble, that. Staking everything on a great expedition

across the Alps. He needed a victory. What did he mean by that? He could spare only a few days to the task of gaining that victory. He would crush the victorious Melas within a few days and return to Paris. He spoke of it as a mere vacation from his work of building a government, a frolic across the Alps to get a great victory for the public appetite, for the politicians, a spectacle for the glowering eyes of the allied monarchs of Europe. And if the Corsican failed, what then but the politicians at his throat, the shadow of the guillotine across his faltering trail? The very magnitude of the gamble swept Otho with the spirit of its audacious recklessness.

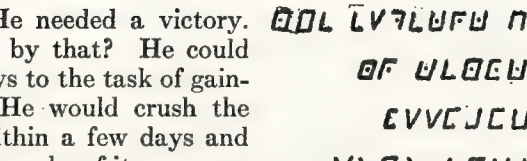
"A letter, my friend, Le Falcon!"

The bantering voice of Fullois snapped his thoughts. The Frenchman took the envelop from a flunkey at the door, sniffed it suspiciously and handed it to Otho.

"It has not the odor of a billet-doux," Fullois scoffed, "therefore it must be only a request for payment. Ho, but when we return from Italy, we shall not have to be pestered by landladies and shopmen."

Otho took the missive with a calculated nonchalance and dropped it indifferently into his pocket. He knew the message must come from Le Montier's rendezvous. Le Carbenne would have used a soldier courier. Plobo was unable to write even his own name. Did it mean that his cousin Ferdinand was back from his junket to Vienna? Or that Le Montier was suspicious, or at the end of his patience?

At the end of the day he hurried to his billet. A puzzling scrawl met his eyes, a brief formal invitation to dine with some one of whom he had never heard. But it was done on the telltale parchment used by Vekuss. He noted that the writing was at the top of the letter and, in sudden understanding, applied the sheet closely to the heat of an oil lamp. Shortly the white surface was mottled by symbols as the pigment of lemon juice was brought to the surface by heat. The cipher message was brief:



He took from a small wad of wax in his portmanteau the secret key and reduced the symbols to their German text. The order was unequivocal, unmistakable.

The emperor commands you to return to Vienna immediately by Metz-Strassbourg.

Otho touched the parchment to the flame of his lamp, thoughtfully watched the fire consume it, and crumpled the ashes with his fingers. So Vekuss and Ferdinand were placing no further dependence upon the bungling French police? With their intended victim back in Austria, they could make certain of their work. Of their design, Otho found no glimmer of doubt. His death was now imperative to their designs. They had gone too far with their intrigue against him to turn back on any account. He must die in support of their own records and their future peace of mind.

He caught the telltale omen in the very wording of Vekuss' command. For what honest reason should Vekuss fix the route of return to Austria? He smiled serenely at the subterfuge. No doubt trusted assassins of the Black Cabinet were on their way at this moment to ambush him.

For a long time Otho sat in solemn study. It did not suit his present purpose to shout defiance at Vienna. He would play them at their own game of wits. The words of the Corsican returned. The Austrians must be left to their own stupid estimate of the French designs. Otho seized his pen and shaped with painstaking care a cryptic evasion to the emperor's command.

Impossible to come while events so important impend. Watch Moreau closely at frontier.

To this message in cipher he attached his own symbol and under it fixed the seal

of Moskolz. That would lend the rascals something to puzzle over—the approval of their trusted Hungarian agent to Otho's refusal. And it would be certain to fix the eyes of the Aulic Council upon the Army of the Rhine.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CORSICAN'S TRIBUNAL

THE lapse of three days without further word through Le Montier convinced Otho that his message had gone promptly on to Vienna. He concluded that his cousin Ferdinand must not have returned, that Le Montier was waiting in fretful inaction for the reappearance of Moskolz and that, therefore, the Austrian secret service in Paris groped impotently. But if he hoped to be on his way to Martigny with Fullois, leaving an empty trail behind him, by the time the Black Cabinet was at his heels again, his expectations were shattered early on the fourth day thereafter. The letter came by post, in plain text, and was a blunt order to report to Le Montier's the whereabouts of Moskolz.

To this note he paid no attention, but when a second demand, in the same words, arrived on the fifth morning, and a third that afternoon, he dispatched a terse request that no further letters be sent, lest they be intercepted. To this he attached Moskolz' seal, but the only effect was to increase the volume of their demand. Where was Moskolz? What had happened to their plans to save France? Did Otho understand the consequence of his disobedience to Imperial orders? He would present himself forthwith at Le Montier's for counsel. This final mandate was signed with the seal of Ferdinand himself; Ferdinand, back from Vienna, and in a fever of impatience at the riddle of Moskolz.

"Ho, but your *petite amie* is most insistent, Monsieur Le Falcon," Fullois broke in as he sat staring at Ferdinand's order. "Or is it, my friend, that you owe many debts? If the first, and the fair lady has lost your interest entirely, ah, but perhaps I can offer to her the consolation. But—" he paused with a despairing shrug—"if it is the debts, *diable!* I have not the single sou left to my soul, but, monsieur—"

"Thank you, my friend, but it is nothing that I can not attend to myself," Otho parried. "Merely a passing annoyance."

"Ah, but if it is debts, part with no good francs, Le Falcon," Fullois cautioned. He leaned close to Otho's ear. "Hear, another four days, my friend, and these pestering fools shall howl into the empty air for their money."

"We are certain to leave Paris in but four days, my Lieutenant?"

"But guard your tongue, Le Falcon. The hour is set. I violate a confidence as one good friend to another."

Four days. Otho leaped to his decision. It would be simple to divert the Austrian wolf pack for that long. At his billet that night he blocked out a message to Ferdinand.

> My dear cousin: You compel me to have an understanding with you. Your indiscretions are intolerable. I have orders to leave Paris and shall do so at once. No further letters will reach me in France. *Au revoir.*

That message would send Ferdinand scurrying to the frontier to watch for him, he reasoned. Ferdinand would read it in his own way, without sensing the grim truth that was bluntly stated in its words. A courier would be sent racing toward Vienna the moment it was received. Otho knew that his life was more an issue with the Black Cabinet now than the movements of the Corsican. The Austrian armies could take care of themselves while Ferdinand and his agents chased the black shadows of their own intrigue.

He packed his effects together, closed his account at the billet, and left by carriage shortly after midnight. He had the driver let him out at an isolated point to the east of the Seine and dismissed the vehicle. Then he hurried through a beech thicket to another road where Fullois was

in waiting with a cabriolet of the consulate. In this he drove to the Tuileries. The four remaining days he would spend at the map room. He did not underrate the resourcefulness of the conniving Ferdinand. His cousin would verify his departure from Paris in his own way. But Otho entered the Tuileries secure in the belief that he had left a blind trail behind him. At any rate, he told himself, he had matched cunning play with equal cunning.

The Army of the Reserve had been breaking up for some days past into flowing streams of men, animals and vehicles. The rendezvous in the region of Chalons had broken first, followed by Dijon. Couriers from Lyon, nearest the Alps, had brought word overnight that its battalions were now in motion.

The message from Lyon displaced the last of the wax headed pins. Messengers began arriving every few minutes at the Tuileries with reports from the scattered bivouacs. Each division gave the location of its battalions at each leg of the march together with an estimate of its progress for the morrow. Lannes already was approaching Martigny with the first elements of his advance guard. Within a fortnight, if all went smoothly, the Army of the Reserve would be debouching through the passes of the Great St. Bernard ready to come to grips with Melas.

Otho and Fullois were kept busy this morning posting their maps. There was no saying when the First Consul would demand information of the progress of his army. The locations of units must be recorded with the most exacting accuracy so that he could gather at a glance the whole situation. The lieutenants must be prepared, likewise, to furnish the smallest details of how far this regiment marched the day before, what progress the artillery was making, what delays had been encountered. So far there had been no delay. The army was stretching its legs in fine fettle, eager to be over the Alps and at the throats of the unsuspecting Austrians.

THROUGHOUT the forenoon, Otho was tormented by each new appearance of the trusted old French Grenadier who brought messages from the door. But when midday brought no word through Le Montier he breathed easily again. His ruse had succeeded, he told himself. Even now a courier must be hurrying toward Vienna with the warning, Ferdinand himself scurrying here and there trying to pick up the trail en route. The picture brought him a double solace. Whimsical as the Corsican's hope of secrecy might appear, incredible as it might be that the thrust at Italy would escape Austrian eyes and understanding, the official eyes of Austria's spymasters were diverted at this critical hour by their own greedy design. By the time they had awakened to Otho's empty trail, it would be too late, he exulted.

An officer of the Consular Guards, with saber drawn and a squad at his back, strode into the map room, as if on the heels of Otho's thoughts. He looked from Fullois to Otho with a dull, level stare.

"I have business with the Citizen Lieutenant Otho Le Falcon," he announced in a heavy official monotone.

"But do not come bustling into my presence in any such silly fashion," bristled Fullois. "Dummox, do you not know that this is a room of secrecy?"

"I hold an order for the arrest of Le Falcon," said the Grenadier. He centered his eyes upon Otho. "You, from the description of my order, are Le Falcon."

"I am Le Falcon," Otho affirmed quietly. The suddenness of the blow had staggered him only momentarily. Then he knew that Ferdinand had struck—through the French police again. "Of what am I accused?"

"Of conspiracy against the person of the First Consul, Citizen Lieutenant," said the Grenadier. "Of treason against the French republic!"

"An absurdity!" shouted Fullois, goaded to a sudden fury by the charge. "Do you not know, monsieur, that Le Falcon is my friend, a trusted officer of the

Hussars—yes, and a great favorite of the First Consul? Some one shall sweat for this! Yes, even if it is Fouche himself, he shall answer to me for this outrage!"

"Stand aside, Citizen Lieutenant," the Grenadier commanded Fullois. "I have my orders. The court will pass upon the case in its own way."

The squad closed about Otho and marched him rapidly through the Tuileries to an awaiting conveyance in which he was driven to the prison at the barracks of the Consular Guard. There he was not left long in uncertainty of the case that had been devised against him. A court-martial was convened and waiting for his case; ten senior officers of the line, members of a permanent tribunal whose function was to mete out swift justice to military intriguers against the new republic. The court moved with well oiled celerity. The charges were read and a dozen witnesses, all soldiers of the Consular Guard, marched into the room to testify.

As their testimony unfolded, Otho was thrown into blank amazement by what he had heard. He had expected charges of espionage, charges that he was in Paris as an agent of Austria. This accusation he intended to answer with a recital of the stark facts. He would show the court, as best he might, that Count Otho of Austria was a creature of the past; that he, Le Falcon, was a loyal soldier of the republic.

But the testimony stripped all defense from under his feet. Each in turn swore that Lieutenant Le Falcon, the prisoner before their eyes, had urged them to incite revolt against the consulate. He had promised each of them a captain's commission in the palace guards once the king was on his throne. This had happened on the street outside the barracks while they were returning from pass the night before. The lieutenant also warned them that they were to be sent across the frontier of Switzerland to be slaughtered by an overwhelming Austrian army.

"Messieurs, this is an outrage against an innocent man!" Otho cried when the last witness against him had been heard. "I was at my billet last night until the hour of midnight."

"You have proof, Citizen Lieutenant?" demanded a somber member of the court. The officer added with a sneer, "Proof that will put to shame the honest tongues of twelve loyal Grenadiers?"

The other's words, the cold, set faces of the whole tribunal, told Otho the hopelessness of his case. He sank back in his chair. The court reached its verdict by a mere exchange of glances. A colonel rose and delivered the verdict. Guilty as charged. Death by the firing squad. He droned his words with a drab indifference.

"The officer of the guard," he commanded, "shall divest this felon Le Falcon of all markings and insignia of the Hussars, and shall hold him securely in confinement until the official hour of sunrise, when he shall personally cause to be carried into execution the full mandate of this court."

Otho's faculties were a jumble as the steel bars of the death cell clanked shut behind him. Arrest, trial and sentence had occupied less than two hours. His mind raced to blurred conclusions. So the French had closed upon him in their own way. This hardly could be the work of Ferdinand. Even Le Montier could not have framed the testimony of loyal Grenadiers. He laughed mockingly aloud, in a wracking bitterness of soul. Had he fallen a dupe to that shrewd Corsican's wile? Had Bonaparte used him as a tool to feed false reports to the Austrians? The campaign in Italy, was it nothing more than a hoax to divert attention from the frontier? Le Falcon, then, had fared no better than Count Otho. Except that he had fallen a surer victim to brash intrigue. The French goose had been plucked indeed.

Thought of death convulsed him with horror. He was not afraid to die. But as Le Falcon he had only begun to live. He had thought there was much work left for Le Falcon in the world. Double sentries paced back and forth across the front of his cell. He saw there was no hope of escape. At six o'clock the sen-

tries began calling the hour. Six o'clock and all is well. Seven o'clock and all is well. Otho composed himself. He remembered that he must be prepared to face the muskets of the Grenadiers. At sunrise the French must see that Le Falcon knew how to die.

CHAPTER XXIV

MASQUERADE

AS THE evening wore on Otho lay on the floor. His mind was clear, he was master of his emotions as he reviewed the past. It gave him occupation through the long hours of the night. He weighed in critical analysis his conclusions of the early afternoon. He found them losing substance. He reenacted in intimate detail his days as Le Falcon in the map room at the Tuileries. Fullois' swiftly growing friendship and ready enthusiasm, that could not have been mere masquerade. The Corsican's interest in the wax headed pins, the tension among high commanders, the daily flood of jaded couriers with reports from marching columns. Why such ramification in the carrying out of a mere trick? And if it was not a trap, if the Army of Reserve was marching to the Alps, why had the Corsican entrusted a suspect with the secret until the last critical hour before tossing him to the mercies of a court?

Out of the conflicting welter of these reflections, Otho was struck by a sudden light of understanding. The answer swept into his mind, and cast aside the whole tangled skein. He sprang to his feet, flooded by a frenzy of hope, and pounded upon the door to attract the sentries.

"The commandant!" he cried. "Summon the commandant instantly. I have important information for his ears."

The sentries exchanged knowing glances, hesitated, then called the captain of the guard. He came at the summons, blinking irritation at his break in his sleep.

"What disturbance is this, Citizen?" the captain growled. "I had taken you for one who could die like a man."

"But I am innocent, my Captain!" exclaimed Otho. "I was speechless today when these accusations fell upon me. Now I have the truth. I am the victim of a foul trick. I can clear myself. Let me tell you—"

"Contain yourself, Citizen," replied the officer, unmoved. "In that cell, some of you felons breed strange hopes. But the order is written for your death and you might as well accept the fact."

"If you will listen, my Captain, I can convince you. You would not want it on your conscience that you executed an innocent man."

"If your stomach has failed you, Citizen, I will have a potion brought. It would be the more on my conscience if you do not die like a Hussar."

"A bargain then, my Captain," Otho shot out as the other turned away. "In my effects are my watch and two hundred francs of silver. They are yours if you will but summon my friend, Lieutenant Fullois, from his billet on the Rue de Rivoli."

The captain debated this proposal briefly.

"Done, my fellow, if that will console you," he accepted. "A messenger will go forthwith for your lieutenant, but remember that if he does not come, it is no fault of mine, and I shall claim the right to collect."

Otho mastered himself as the captain left. He saw that his life still hung by a slender thread. It was not enough that he had discerned the truth. He must get those facts to the eyes of high authority. These jailers would only think him wracked by fear, grasping at last straws of hope. He must wait in patience, plan carefully, insist with a cool show of nerve that he be heard. Hours dragged by. There was a disconcerting omen now in the call of those sentries. Two o'clock and all is well. Three hours had passed since he bargained with the captain. Had the rascal collected his effects, leaving in their place Otho's written order, and gone back to bed? If a messenger had been sent, had he been unable to find Fullois?

Had the lieutenant, repelled by the charges of treachery, refused to come?

Three o'clock was approaching. Another two hours and the captain of the guard would come to carry out that doleful order of the military court. Otho's patience was at the breaking point, he was on the point of launching an outraged demand for the captain when Fullois appeared suddenly in the dank prison corridor. Fullois was cold and reserved as he presented himself at the door.

"Withhold your judgment of me, my friend," Otho greeted him in a low, contained voice. "I have called you to ask that you exert yourself in behalf of my innocence, Lieutenant Fullois."

"But what is there I can do, Le Falcon?" Fullois replied with a despairing shrug. "The court, it has spoken."

"Yet if the First Consul knew the truth, my Lieutenant, he would set aside the court's action quickly enough. I ask only for a brief hearing. He can not fail to be convinced."

"If you will but give me the facts first, my friend."

"No. I have thought better of that while I waited for you, monsieur. There is but one way in which I can clear myself. If the First Consul is not instantly convinced, I will die willingly, my friend, and you will have done your duty."

Fullois hesitated.

"Come, my friend," Otho pleaded. "Can not you see that I am innocent of such hideous charges? I did not send for you because I am afraid. You can see for yourself that I am not. See, my hand is as steady as yours. But I have business left in the world, and if you will do this for me—well, you shall see. Tomorrow we shall be at work together, by the First Consul's command, and the day after we shall leave together as we have planned to do!"

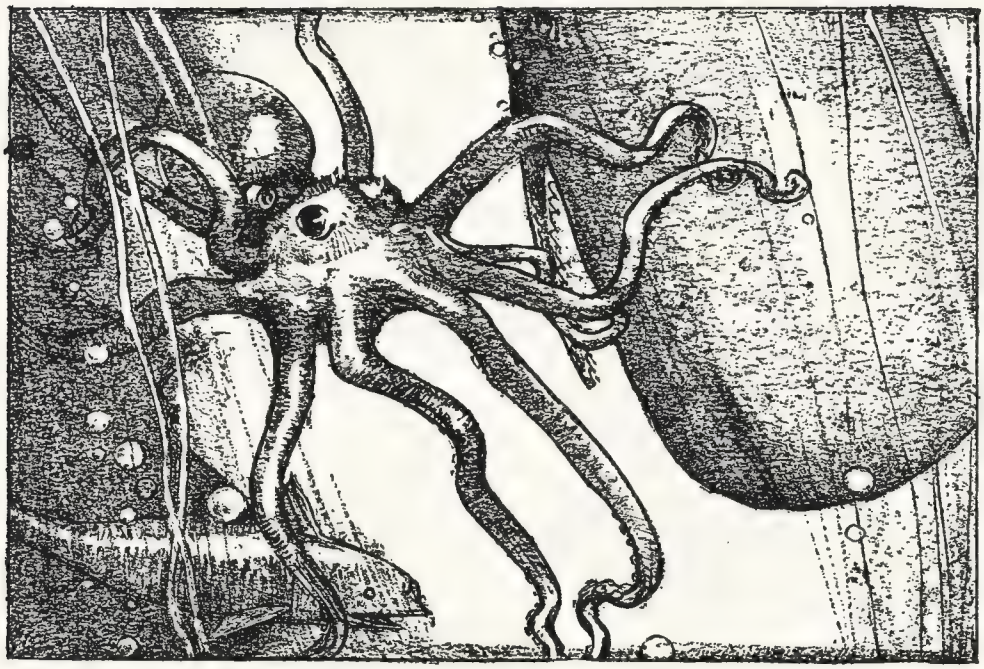
A glow of sympathy melted Fullois' eye. He thrust his hand through the door and gripped Otho's shoulder impulsively.

"I shall go, my friend," he cried. "I read the truth in your eyes. I go immediately. It is now three o'clock. Yes, even if I must force the valet-de-chamber to awaken him, I shall catch the little Corporal's ear. He can do no more than hang me. Have cheer, Le Falcon, I shall not fail!"

TO BE CONCLUDED

MEDUSA DINES

By PAUL ANNIXTER



IT WAS on the congenial slope of an undersea mountain, five hundred fathoms sheer beneath the beryl and lune-green surface waters, that Medusa lived and dined—the two words were almost synonymous and equally perpetual.

She was the vast white squid that dwells on the ocean floor—the abiding scourge and nightmare, when all is said and done, of all the fearsome forms that range the ocean depths. No inoffensive eight-armed octopus, mind you, but the terrible ten-armed devilfish, the decapod of natural history, and perhaps the most awesome form left living on this earth. For more years than any of the deep sea dwellers round about could recall, Medusa had reigned over this spectral, shadow haunted realm, battening endlessly on the lesser life about her.

She had a cylindrical sac-like body shaped like a dirigible, large as a whale's, and her ten python-like tentacles radiating spokewise from this livid mass, were forty to forty-five feet long and big around as the masts of a ship. Two vast eyes, like lidless pools of horror, ink-black and rimmed with white, glared hatefully from the center of an undelineated head with a malignancy not of this earth. Below these a toothless, parrot beaked cavern of a mouth kept up a continuous senile sucking and gnashing. The whole of this nightmarish apparition was death-pale, naked, hairless, scaleless and blotched, like unto a leper.

Thus you have her, crouched like some stupendous submarine spider in

the opening of her favorite grotto, a black cave that lost itself far down in the bowels of the mountain. Her tentacles were bunched up before her as if she meditated on some ancient evil. Or perhaps she slept; none could say. Sleeping or waking she looked the same; the appalling inky eyes never closed but continued to hold their eternal Gorgon's stare.

Two other great but lesser cuttles dwelt likewise on that mountain slope. These two for many years had been Medusa's courtiers, though always from afar. Years before—heaven and herself alone knew how many—there had been a third suitor, but this smaller, bolder spirit had quickly passed from the stage of events, having disappeared in an unwary minute down the bleached queen's gullet.

At the moment we intrude upon Medusa's sleep or rest, or wicked meditation, she was engaged in the perennial game of those fear haunted depths—a hide-and-seek for prey. Medusa was the hider, her prey the unwitting seekers. About her as she sprawled, half choking the entrance to her grotto and trailing over the chasm which fell away below it, a jungle of fern-like Laminaria grew in rank profusion, interspersed with beds of giant algæ whose yellow-white fronds waved gently, moved by some faint current, as branches would wave in our earthly forests. Among these Medusa's stealthy arms could creep unseen along the grayish slope, to whip up from some unguessed point forty feet away from the dreadful watching eyes. Like riatas of white gristle they would wrap themselves about the prey in a choking double coil which nothing could release, for their undersides were covered with round suction disks which clung like vacuum cups and their tips were studded with fierce curved claws of black horn.

Just now no life moved in all the dim obscurity round about her. The reason was the recent fierce struggle of a giant rockfish Medusa had devoured some half hour before, a commotion so titanic that it had roiled the depths for hundreds of yards about. By and by when the floating silt had settled, the region would become populous once again. In the meantime Medusa continued to wait, to wait. Impatience was as unknown to her as to the mystically swaying seaweed round about.

At length the death-like interlude which had fallen over those parts was broken, and a pageant of life began again to cruise the nearby depths. Unbelievable monstrosities, blends of fish, worm, snake and crab, began issuing from the weed beds wherein they had hidden themselves; other forms, living yet vegetal, quivered to movement amid the rock crannies, screening the silt with waving cilia.

HOW were they visible, when no faintest ray of sunlight could penetrate those depths? The secret was that almost all the depth dwellers carry their own electric lighting system, so to speak. In the marvelous economy of nature, the element of phosphor which in most organisms is a negligible quantity, is in the sea depths put to the vital use of incandescence; the weird citizens of the sea floor carrying with them groups of tiny phosphor lamps that glow and fade at the will of their owners, rendering them invisible at will or lighting up the surrounding depths for them. Even the sea lilies and other plant-like creatures emitted a faint, nebulous glow, an elusive iridescence such as shines on the treacherous surface of a quagmire, fading every other moment to the point of extinction, then reviving again as if softly breathed upon.

Likewise in the waters themselves floating myriads of those tiny beings called infusoria, who are the fireflies of the sea, emitted a wan, spectral luminance; and even the teeming ooze of the sea floor itself gave forth an elusive shine for eyes sufficiently sensitive to reflect its feeble vibrations—a light similar to the shine of snow on a dark,

moonless winter night in the world above.

A fierce deep sea eel was the next prey to come within the range of Medusa's ambushed tentacles. Sloe-black, with a faint greenish tinge along his back, this prowler came undulating up from the lightless depths like a thick snake. Boneless, finless, six feet long and lithe as rubber, he wound his way in sooty loops amid the feathery sea jungle, his blank, black eyes set in a blunt, dog-like head, on the watch for possible prey. His twisting course was made obscurely visible by a greeny-silver glow that shone in spots along his underside.

Medusa waited until the newcomer was well within the range of one of her claw tipped arms, camouflaged among the weeds. Then the tentacle suddenly whipped aloft. Even before he rightly saw the fatal streamer stir, instinct had put the eel to flight. He dived like a black streak toward the depths beyond the ledge, but his speed was pitifully inadequate beside the whiplash stroke of that pallid arm which wound him in a rending grip of steel-like gristle just back of his neckless head.

Now an eel is about the most ticklish proposition in the deep to catch and hold. Besides being slippery as ice, they squirm with an unbelievable icy, slimy, tingling, electric squirm that magicks them out of many and many a maw that is already set to devour them. But the tentacle of a cuttlefish is still another and knottier proposition. Nothing short of amputation can release the grip of its suction disks, once they have clamped fast.

And so, despite his struggles, the eel was dragged slowly and inexorably across the silt beds until he reached Medusa's swollen form; then the beaked mouth gaped like a cavern and the eel was thrust in head first to pass into the seething cauldron of digestive juices which served as a stomach for the vast cuttle.

At the first pulsations of the eel's struggle in the surrounding water, all the ghostly lights of plant and animal in the neighborhood of Medusa's lair were once more extinguished in terror. For to all the lesser beings of the bottom world such a violent commotion was a signal for "lights out." For a space, therefore, after the eel had disappeared, that particular part of the mountainside was again shrouded in blackness except for the glowworm glimmer of the infusoria which intensified rather than relieved the gloom, like Milton's dread abode of devils, made more frightful by intermittent bursts of fire.

Medusa's vast tentacles writhed and bunched together for a few moments, the beaked mouth champed again and again as if savoring the meal, and into the death-like hating eyes a lambent, sulphury glow came and went. Then the eyes turned inky and opaque again, the tentacles spread out, immersing themselves once more in the ooze, and a heavy stillness seemed to hold the waters tranced.

Memory, however, which is short-lived in all the animal world, is phenomenally so in the case of deep sea dwellers, and it is fortunate that it is so, else their lives would be one continuous agony of trepidation.

Soon therefore, though a tragedy of the first magnitude had been enacted here, greedy and murderous forms once more cruised the nearby depths, stalking or being stalked, with hunger as their driving force. As against a black velvet curtain, little points and eyes and streamers of light began glowing again like street lights winking on in a district which had been immersed in darkness. The carnivorous sea-lilies gradually relighted their greenish fox fire glows, swaying mystically as they lured to them the tiny living organisms on which they fed.

Enormous polypi resumed their winnowing of the silt with giant fins and fish of incredible aspect passed to and fro in a constantly streaming luminous activity that rivaled a city street on a Saturday night.

HERE, certainly, nature had outdone herself in the fashioning of strange and fantastic forms. The majority of the fishy denizens were little more than vast gaping mouths with sack-like stomachs behind them. Some indeed seemed stomachs only, with cavernous jaws gaping at the top. Certain creatures were like the specters of fish, filmy transparent forms with long streamers of vaporous light trailing back behind them like winding sheets. The few which resembled the fish of the upper waters belied the fact when they opened their mouths which were invariably cut back to the very base of their heads.

And some of these, by the way, were all head, the bodies dwindling away rearward to thin, whip-like tails, while certain others had apparently no heads at all and only rudimentary pinpoints of black to mark where eyes should have been. As far as the vision carried down glimmering water vistas, these prowlers could be made out, more or less obscurely like figures seen through mist.

All, or almost all of them, carried their own illumination, advertising their coming by points of light like taxicabs threading distant thoroughfares. A few were so amazingly lighted from stem to stern that they had the appearance of passing ships with glowing portholes. One terrifying ghost-fish which presently swam into view had luminous eyes and teeth, the latter gnashing together in a truly terrible and apocalyptic manner; another had a luminous, transparent belly whose entire contents were plainly visible; still another had a swaying lantern of phosphor which hung on a bracket-like arm growing out of his snout, and two long, golden antennæ which flowed backward on either side of him like gala lights in some nocturnal festivity.

The next traveler to come within range of the cuttle's lurking arms was a crab, but such a crab as was never seen in the upper reaches of the ocean. A dead, blue-black in color, the spread of his enormous nippers was a good fourteen feet. The creature's fierce eyes, like shiny black excrescences, were aglow with a sinister, almost human malignance, as it traversed the rocky slopes in erratic, sidelong rushes. It fought with all the ferocity of its battling breed when a stealthy tentacle seized it, but its struggles were as ineffectual as those of its predecessors.

Hardly had the crab disappeared the way of the eel, when another strange depth dweller appeared on the scene. He had come post haste to investigate the commotion, despite the warning darkness that had again fallen over the neighborhood. He could afford to take the risk—or thought he could—being over twenty feet long, but that only proved he was a stranger to that region and wholly unaware of the grim reputation of Medusa's grotto.

The newcomer was an oarfish, one of the largest and queerest inhabitants of the sea floor. For all its length the stranger's body was little more than a foot in thickness, silver-gray in color and apparently boneless as a lamprey. It moved through the water by means of a sinuous, serpentine wriggling, aiding its progress by a pair of long, paddle shaped fins which sprouted from either side of its mild looking head, and gave the fish its name.

The oarfish's curiosity was satisfied—swiftly and for all time. One of Medusa's pale and tapering arms came forth and met him halfway from the center of turmoil—the sort of hand shake none could ignore, that was, nor ever know but once. Then amid renewed lurchings, heavings and churnings, Medusa dined once more, which made, if you care for figures, considerable over one thousand pounds of raw, living, kicking, squirming provender consumed within the span of an hour and a half. Ballast enough, in all conscience, to pause and meditate upon.

And Medusa did so, lapsing into a feeding dream, her eyes still flat staring, soulless and repellent with that expression of cold malevolence that is all that sea folk know.

As we have shown, things moved so sluggish slow in this abysmal nether world that time was not; even day and night, Winter and Summer, were quite the same, for below the thousand-foot level the temperature never changes, and not even the ultra-violet rays of the sun can ever penetrate. There is no telling, therefore, how long Medusa might have sprawled there feeding at the mouth of her grotto had not something overtaken her. Nothing less than a season—the subtly miraculous mating time of the cuttle kind.

Now no man—nor fish for all of that—has ever known the giant cuttlefish to have an actual mate. The reason is that these monsters are cursed with a bottomless and insatiable voracity—a gnawing, clawing appetite which never lets them rest and beside which all other functions, even reproduction, are overshadowed. To devour—that is the primal urge of the devilfish's life, developed to such a degree that nature is forced to take a hand in the game for the preservation of the species.

Therefore, at certain seasons the vast cuttles grow a mysterious eleventh tentacle, a curious, dwarfed, blunt headed thing which upon reaching maturity detaches itself from the body and floats away. In due time this finds the cuttle's predestined spouse to which it quickly attaches itself. In this extraordinary way alone the devilfish is reproduced. Were the actual mates to come together, a battle royal would ensue which would end in the death of the smaller, and if that does not prove that the squid kind are accursed servants of the Evil One, I should like to have such proof.

Such a time had come to Medusa. What heralded it none but the fishes could have said. Perhaps it was a different, stronger scent of musk that is said to emanate from the great cuttles at such times, filling the waters with an invisible elixir by which kind calls to kind by wireless as it were. At any rate the season was at hand.

Medusa was slow to answer the urge, perhaps because there was so much of her to stir. She showed nothing, absolutely nothing that could have been taken for emotion; but underneath, in the deeps below the deeps of the sub-subconscious wherein all cold blooded things function, she was stirred. The result was that for the first time in many years, she ceased to feed, and that was a whole lot in the way of a miracle. It was, in fact, well nigh history making for those parts.

News of that got around by water telegraph to all the lesser hunted ilks—that the cuttle kind were engaged for the present in love, not hunting, and that the going there and thereabouts was safe.

MEDUSA was straightway filled with a subtle unease, a stir of new and amazing activity. To her had come one of those mysterious urges which the vast cuttles feel but once or twice in a lifetime—usually during the restless mating time—a call to visit the upper reaches of the ocean for a brief period. For a long time, however, she gave no sign, made no move to issue from her fearsome, weed hung lair. A good twenty-four hours passed before she quite made up her mind.

Finally she got under way, very slowly at first, as if loath to break her trance. Upward along the pumice slopes of the mountain she set her course. At first she crawled, slow and sluggish, dragging her great bulk along like a spider, and it was decidedly not a sight for the nervous or bibulous. Once more all life became suspended as word of the bleached queen's coming ran ahead of her. All the living fireworks of the region turned off again, leaving Medusa a vague ghost form, uncanny and indefinite, wending the spectral dark.

The vegetable creatures contracted into their crannies; other unknown forms, like shooting stars with jets and tails of bubbles in their wake, almost annihilated one another in their blind haste to give her the road. But Medusa did not stop

to argue with any of these, nor tarry by the way. Food for once was out of mind.

Finally launching herself into the water, she really got going, her progress now the hideous backward progress of all her kind. Gathering her snaky arms into a cluster and trailing them out behind her, she shot upward in a series of horrid lunges, achieved by sucking in great volumes of water in the propulsion sack beneath her tentacles and spewing it violently forth behind her, blowing herself along by sheer waterpower.

She was one of the two or three forms in all the ocean who could pass at will from the unplumbed depths of the bottom to the sunlit tides above without her form being distorted out of all shape by the release of the terrific pressure under which she had lived. The whole of her bloodless bulk had the hardness and toughness of seasoned gutta percha, and was built to withstand pressures that would have crushed the oaken hull of a ship.

Presently the nameless cold and gloom of the lower depths began to lighten as Medusa rose, past the twilight of the cuttle realm, past the dull gray fog of the middle ocean, to the dazzling bottle-green of the surface waters where the denizens began to resemble normal fish in shape and color.

Once a great shark, swimming deep after little squid, caught sight of the tip of one of her streamers and dived for it, mistaking the arm for the whole animal. In the middle of the dive he glimpsed the vast bulk of Medusa herself looming like an island beneath. He could not check his rush, but he could change its direction. He did so with a desperate corkscrew twist that must almost have snapped him in two, then shot surfaceward again, doubtless wondering if his brain were going. He had seen many things, that shark. He had hunted the great octopods of the northern ocean; he had seen the monster sperm, or cachelot whale, one of the vastest living forms, but neither of these could compare with this stupendous vision.

Medusa, giving no sign beyond snapping her nasty gape, sped onward as before with silent speed, and presently she reached the warm and sparkling surface waters. There she would sprawl for a space, like some bad dream left over from the night, to bask and stare at the miracle of the sunlit upper world. What she got from this I do not know, but it must have been something vastly satisfying. Twice before—untold seasons ago, that was—she had done this thing with pleasurable memory, before sinking downward again through the pathless wilderness of waters to deposit her countless eggs on the submarine mountain slopes. But this, as the phrase has it, was another day, and it was here the orca pack discovered her—the dreaded killer whales, who were the scourge and terror of the upper ocean as she was of the depths below.

These savage, sharp toothed pirates were all unknown to her, and at first she tried to battle them. But of what use is it to hold one powerless while a dozen others ring one round? The killers lunged in and out with the deadly pack unity of wolves of the upper world. Their torpedo shaped bodies revolved like augurs in her grip, their jaws working like saw edged shears, lopping off the sensitive ends of her tentacles.

FEAR gripped Medusa, the most terrible fear she had ever known, and lunging, lurching, she shot downward into the depths, and as she went she squirted forth from a gland between her tentacles, jets of inky fluid which colored the water in her wake like a black smoke screen. It was the flag of defeat of the devilfish clan, and it was meant to veil her flight, but it availed her nothing now. The killers were swifter than she; in point of fact, they were the fastest things in all the waters. They made sport with her as the battle sank into the depths, ringing her round, lunging, tearing, ripping.

The killers finally won, as killers al-

ways do. But that was not the end. That came far, far down in the lightless realm from whence she had come, as was fitting it should. As the battle descended news that the great queen of the depths was wounded ran before her, and soon other pirates swarmed to join the killers—huge sharks, sea pike, and lean, lance-like barracuda with fierce crocodile jaws. The cloudy depths became terror ridden with whipping, lashing forms and malevolent eyes that gleamed like phosphor. At the three thousand foot level, beyond which no mammal may pass and live, the killers—for they were mammals with hot blood in their veins—were forced to turn back. But by that time Medusa had only stumps remaining where her arms had been.

At six hundred and fifty fathoms, even the hordes of the shark folk could no longer endure the pressure, and turned surfaceward. Here Medusa might have been safe again had she had an arm or two left to defend herself. But behind her now flowed a trail of the pallid fluid which passed as blood for such as she. Therefore that which transpired on the ocean floor was the most terrible of all. For the sharks were succeeded in ever increasing numbers by the myriad, voracious scavengers of the bottom, of every kind and family except those legless, finless forms which could neither swim nor crawl, all drawn like flies from afar through their acute and marvelous senses by the taint of blood.

Soon Medusa's giant carcass was fairly boiling with light and life as the hungry hordes fought and tore at her and each other with ravening teeth. Many were killed by her titanic tossing and rolling; many of the smaller diners as they gorged, went to gorge their larger fellows. But their number was legion and in the end they conquered.

Medusa's fierce life passed from her, and in the eternal balance of things her body lived again in the thousands of nightmare subjects over which she had ruled—some of it even in the weeds and bushes and gray-white ooze which had given her shelter and good hiding during grim, unnumbered years.

Singular Cinés

By CAPTAIN MANSFIELD

MOVING PICTURE fans at Jolo, on the island of that name, are sometimes treated to thrills other than those produced by the program. The crowded movie theater excels the market place for the fanatical Suluman to run amok and slaughter Christians in. It is not so easy to escape in the packed "ciné", and the *juramentado*, as he is called, may gather many slaves to accompany him to heaven before some American in the audience stops him with a bullet.

At the Zamboango theater for awhile, if the picture lacked excitement, it was the favorite sport for some wag in the audience to shout, "*Juramentado!*" and watch the Filipinos frantically stampede for the exits. The game became unpopular, and stopped after several jokers were sent to the penal farm at San Ramon.

An enterprising Vermonter built a ciné, against the advice of his friends, on Basilan, another island in the Sulu Sea.

His friends argued that the Yakans, natives of the island, being more or less devil-worshipers, would not overcome their suspicions sufficiently to attend a movie show.

The theater was erected on piles over a swamp, so there was no rent to pay, and it was large enough to hold all the Yakans on the island.

The natives held aloof for weeks, but curiosity overcame the better judgment of the headman of a village and he allowed himself to be bribed by a bottle of gin to enter the theater. Nothing unusual happened to the chief, as the kick in the gin was drowned by water, so in spite of the dire warnings of the medicine men, many others attended.

All was going well, and the proprietor was making money enough to pay for his lights, as he manufactured the electricity himself, when a boa constrictor got the chief's carabao calf, monkeys stripped his banana trees and one of his wives gave birth to twins.

After that spiteful work of Satan there was no Yakan money received at the theater for some time. The few who still attended were stray Filipinos, Sulumen and Samal sea Gypsies, who do not believe even in the devil.

Fortunately for the proprietor, his overhead was light and he kept the ciné going on Saturday nights until the unmarried Yakans overcame their fears and came back. Again business was good, and a phonograph and three records were purchased from a stray American to take the place of an orchestra.

Then the catastrophe happened. The devil put the kibosh on the ciné with a master stroke. At least the Yakans put the blame on his Satanic Majesty. They could not tell the whys nor wherefores as their white brothers might have done. In fact they had not time. They were too busy beating it back to the mountains.

It happened thus: The proprietor's Filipino boy who projected the pictures on the screen—occasionally in correct rotation—got gloriously drunk on his birthday. There was no one else of the island who understood handling the machine, so the boss tried it. All went smoothly until the "Diving Venus," poised for a dive, was projected. The sight of her was enough to give pause to any white man who had spent thirty years in those regions. He paused in his cranking of the machine to feast his eyes. In a moment the nipa thatched building was ablaze.

Luckily there were a few inches of slimy water and two feet of soft mud to break the fall of the fans as they poured pell-mell through doors and window apertures and wallowed ashore unmolested by crocodiles.

Cebu boasts of a ciné where one can get one's money's worth. The show begins around 7:30 P.M. and lasts till midnight, showing mostly serials. The proprietor, a large-hearted man, has the shelf of the ticket window one meter from the floor. All children whose heads are level with the window shelf or below it, get in free, which accounts probably for the many contortionists among the rising generation on the island. Taller children pay five centavos and adults pay ten. Hours before the show is over the stage is packed with sleeping kiddies lying side by side.

Iloilo movie fans have typhoons to thrill them during the change of the monsoons. There is no record of a typhoon ever missing the town. The audience can listen to the wind shrieking outside and the thump of flying missiles hitting the theater. There is the diversion of shorted electric wires, and while they are being repaired lighted candles are planted in their own grease on the boxes and balcony rails. The heated grease drips down on the just and the unjust and the remarks thereon are vivid and to the point. But no one ever walks out before the end.

The Manila steamer, with new reels, is holed up in the nearest shelter—if she is lucky—and there is no change of program. So it is possible to see the same picture for weeks or else stay at home and feed the mosquitos.

HORNS *of the* RAM

By

ROBERT SIMPSON

LEDERBY put the gun down on the table and wrapped his ham of a hand around the brandy bottle.

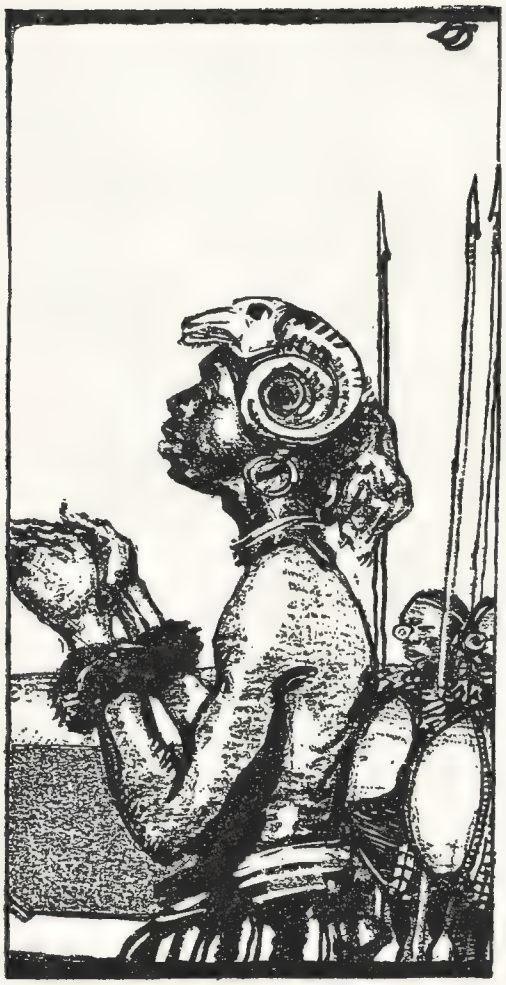
It was a significant gesture; significant of Lederby and of the district of Loano. And the moth clouded light of a stand lamp, sputtering like a dimmed beacon in the smothering deeps of the Nigerian jungle, and scattering its uncertain light into the four corners of Lederby's office-living-room, revealed to any one who happened to be interested, the humble simplicity of the dwelling place of the law in Loano. Lederby was the district commissioner there.

Melvin, the trader, who stood upon the other side of Lederby's table leaning on a golf cleek which he used for a walking stick, was not particularly interested in the setting. Neither was the scrawny native he had brought with him from his trading beach on Rona's Creek. Both were regarding Loano's district commissioner very dubiously and Lederby scowled down upon each of them in turn with the sour suspicion of a man who is seeing life through the fog of defeat and disappointment.

"All right," he grunted finally. "Drinking's better than shooting any time. Say when?"

"No, thanks," Melvin said quietly. "Not now."

"Then what did you come here for if



A Story of African Witchcraft

you're not going to drink or fight?"

"Galo," Melvin said, to the fidgeting native, "be still."

Melvin knew the district commissioner was already quite drunk enough to make the possibility of discussing the Pilker "murder case", or the Pilker mahogany and rubber concessions, decidedly remote. For even when sober, Lederby had shown very little eagerness to clear up the mystery that surrounded the disappearance of James Pilker of Rona's Creek.

It was generally believed in trading circles that Pilker had been killed while on his way downriver on leave. He had left Rona's Creek to make connections with the sternwheeler *Raven*, in a canoe, and the canoe, according to the surviving paddle boys, had capsized in a tornado and Pilker had been drowned or dragged under by crocodiles which were altogether too prevalent in the creeks around Loano. No trace of his body had ever been found.

However, the gossip of the trading beaches had persistently whispered the word murder, and with it the name of Daka, who was a fighting offshoot of the priestly family of N'ri—a maker of *juju* and a reputed expert in black magic who, it was said, fed his enemies to his gods of the water.

Pilker, who had made something of a study of *juju* practises in the Niger Delta, had claimed that Daka had never been

caught in red handed murder because he disposed of his victims by a form of hypnotic suggestion. No one had pretended to know just how this was worked—if it did work at all—but Pilker, who was a man of violent likes and dislikes and who had disliked Daka for a long time, had actually kicked this very superior son of N'ri off his beach just as if Daka had been a paddle boy; this merely to indicate to Daka that he, Pilker, was not afraid of him or his bag of *juju* tricks.

Daka did not forget insults and indignities of the sort and, sooner or later, in his own way, he balanced his accounts.

Melvin had no doubt at all on the subject of Pilker's death or the manner of it, but neither he nor any other trader in the Loano district had as yet been able to induce Lederby to take any action in the matter.

"Why do you always insist that I have a chip on my shoulder?" Melvin asked quietly enough after a short pause. "Have I ever—"

"You're here at this time of night for no good," Lederby declared, and poured himself a stiff drink of straight brandy. "You know ruddy well that there's nothing can be done about Pilker's concessions till we have absolute evidence of Pilker's death."

"No—er—I suppose—"

"And if you came here at this hour to try to intimidate me simply because my Yoruba are away attending to a little private business—"

Melvin laughed because the idea was so ridiculous.

"Nonsense, Lederby! And in any case, I didn't know your soldiermen had gone till I arrived."

"No?"

"Of course not. What's the trouble? Is that firebrand Daka getting ready to make more *juju?*"

"What's that? Daka?" Lederby looked heavily at Melvin over the top of the upraised glass. "What do you know about Daka and his *juju?* Eh? Who's been telling you—" Lederby straightened and turned upon the black boy who was edging sidewise toward the screen door. "Here, you! Wait! What's your name?"

"Galo, sah. I be canoe boy, sah."

"Galo? Canoe boy? Whose canoe boy?"

"Daka, sah."

"Huh? Daka's! What you do foh dis place?"

"Mas' Melvin bring me, sah."

"Bushman! I know that much." Then sharply to Melvin, "How did you get hold of one of Daka's canoe boys? And why did you bring him here? What kind of game is this?"

"I brought him here to tell you," Melvin said quietly, "that if Pilker really is dead, Daka killed him."

"Hunh." Lederby's grunt was not encouraging. "That's interesting. Or it would be if it meant anything."

"And if Daka's going to stage another play on Sleeping Creek, now's a good time to—"

"Shut up! Who asked for your advice?"

Lederby leaned across the table belligerently, a sullen resentment clouding his red rimmed eyes. Quite evidently, important as Melvin's information was, it struck the wrong note where Lederby was concerned.

Then the district commissioner of Loano suddenly straightened, drank down the brandy in the glass at a gulp and poured himself another drink with an air of bravado that, coupled with his eagerness to quarrel and employ a gun, was simple evidence to Melvin's experienced eye that he was, for some reason or other, badly rattled, or scared, or both.

"You know where I came from, don't you?" Lederby demanded truculently. "Before they sent me up to this damned rabbit hutch?"

"Sapeli, wasn't it?"

"Sapeli and Segwanga and Warri. Yes, Warri! And do you think any of you ruddy palm oil ruffians dared to give me advice down there? Why, you poor fool, even the Niger Company's agent—the Royal Niger Company, Melvin, that used to run this blasted country before we government johnnies dropped in to take

charge of things—used to come to me and say, 'Lederby, you have the right ideas. Things are running like a watch. Fine stuff, Lederby, old chap. Keep it up. We're all with you!' Hunh. You didn't know that, did you, Melvin?"

Melvin did. He knew all about Lederby's transfer from the lower river districts to Loano; from white flanneled headquarters luxury to the sodden drab loneliness of a post on Loano Creek . . .

IN THE Southern Nigerian government service, being assigned to Loano Creek was a kind of sentence to solitary confinement and it frequently fell upon men who had slipped from grace and who needed the sort of reflection Loano afforded to bring them back to normal.

Certainly, Lederby's story was not new. It was older than the gnarled mango tree that spread its beneficent shade over the veranda of the thatch roofed bungalow that served Lederby as headquarters on Loano Creek. And Lederby had no illusions about the matter.

Life had lifted him to heights far beyond his beginnings, and because he had, in a careless moment, reached upward too far, life had dropped him back into the ruck again.

In the Koraba affair—of incredible memory—he had overstepped his authority and in a moment of rather alcoholic zeal had generously signed away the government's rights to a strip of waterfront property that had been conceded, with certain reservations, to the government by the A. P. A. (African Produce Association) many years before Koraba Creek had boasted even the trace of an oil wharf.

When Lederby had finished signing his name on this memorable occasion, the A. P. A. had once more come into possession of its ancient rights, and the government, together with several trading firms now strewn along the banks of Koraba Creek, had virtually become tenants of the A. P. A.

The matter, of course, had not ended there. It had drifted into the courts at Lagos—into the tangled jungles of legal procedure—where the A. P. A. was craftily trying to use the case to reestablish its rights not only in Koraba but elsewhere; while Lederby, to the accompaniment of the unkindest sort of laughter, had been relegated to such forgetfulness as he might find in the jungles that crowded about Loano.

Melvin knew all about this. Almost everybody did. And it explained, in some measure, why Lederby was afraid, in the matter of Pilker's mahogany and rubber concessions, that Melvin had come to visit him at this unusual hour to take some kind of advantage of him—just as the altogether too shrewd representative of the A. P. A. had done in the Koraba affair.

Since then, traders had been anathema to Lederby. He hated and distrusted them without any reservations whatever, and in the Loana district he had made their way as hard and as stony as it was in his power to do.

Of course, in the remote jungles of Loano, the trading stations were far scattered and small—even those that belonged to such huge organizations as the Niger Company, the A. P. A. and Marsden's—and most of them were owned by struggling and straggling independent traders like Melvin, who were too low for Lederby's serious consideration; lower even than Galo, the canoe boy, who suddenly found Lederby's scowling attention swinging in his direction.

"Daka's canoe boy, eh?" Lederby growled. "Daka's? Which place Daka live?"

"He—he sit down foh him house, sah," Galo offered nervously.

"He sit down, eh? You lying swine, you know damned well Daka never sits down anywhere. He's always on the jump, making a ruddy nuisance of himself."

"Yessah," Galo said, although he did not understand a word of it.

Lederby wheeled on Melvin.

"What's your idea? What did you bring him here for? How did *you* get hold of one of Daka's canoe boys?"

"Daka flogged him and he ran away," Melvin explained patiently. "He came to me for protection, half dead with fear and hunger—with Daka's mark between his shoulders. You know about that, don't you? The V shaped mark that Daka makes—"

"I don't want to see his back," Lederby interrupted sharply, and his head jerked backward oddly, just as if Melvin had hit him. "I tell you I don't want to see it! What's the difference between his back and the backs of a dozen others like him who've come whining to me for sympathy?"

"But he says—"

"They all say it! You don't expect me to believe all that twaddle about them being doomed to die suddenly and mysteriously the next time Daka makes *juju*, simply because he has marked them with a V?" Lederby laughed a short, nervous, ugly laugh. "Anyway, I don't think it is a V. I think it's the horns of a ram."

"A ram?"

Lederby snorted and swung on Galo sharply.

"Come here, you! Here! Into the light of this ruddy lamp where I can see you."

Galo shufflingly obeyed, gripping the shawl-like piece of print cloth tightly about his shoulders. There was an ash-gray pallor on his cheeks and in his eyes a fear of the unseen and unknown that was stark and pitiful. Lederby's bleared eyes considered him with a sour suspicion that was like a challenge. Then, with a sudden, forced gesture, the district commissioner reached out and pulled the piece of print cloth away from Galo's shoulders and spun him about so that the moth clouded light of the stand lamp shone full upon the canoe boy's shoulders and back.

The cuts and welts across the middle of his back were ugly and plentiful enough, but Lederby had no interest in them. His eyes, as it seemed to Melvin, went shrinkingly to the space between the canoe boy's shoulder blades, a space that was now occupied by a curious V shaped mark—something like a rough tattoo—that was distinct and apart from all other markings made by Daka's hippo hide thong.

"Hunh!" Lederby snorted disparagingly. "Not so good. Daka's hand's getting shakier all the time. But I think it's meant to be the horns of a ram for all that." And before Melvin could question this, Lederby twisted Galo about and demanded gruffly, "You say Daka kill Pilker?"

"No—no, sah."

"What?"

"I—I say—maybe so Daka done kill him, sah."

"Maybe so!" Lederby swung hurriedly on Melvin again; just a little too hurriedly, Melvin thought. "What use is 'maybe so' to me? Anybody can say that. And if I listened to every sniveling canoe boy who came in here with the marks of Daka's hippo hide on his back, I'd—Take him away and get to hell out of here! Out! I'll take care of Daka without your ruddy help or interference!"

Lederby put the glass down on the table and took up the gun again. He gestured perfunctorily with the muzzle of the weapon toward the screen door that led out into the unusually silent darkness of the compound.

Melvin did not move. He studied Lederby's expression with a kind of academic interest and wondered if it were true, as some white traders said it was, that Lederby had not tried to prove the death of Pilker of Rona's Creek because to have done so would have compelled him to bring Daka to trial and the rope.

It seemed plain enough to Melvin then that Lederby was afraid of Daka; or, at least, exceedingly nervous about him. And, unquestionably, Daka was worthy of any man's serious consideration whether Daka was drunk or sober.

For Daka, like Lederby, had a failing for "firewater", and was likely then, or at any time, to be quite as drunk as the district commissioner—probably a little more so. And it had not yet been decided in white trading circles whether Daka was more devilish in his cunning and cruelty, while he hovered sullenly between drinks, than he was when the fiery, square faced

gin had taken full possession of his turbulently savage, child-like soul.

Also, if all tales were true, there was an uncanny quality about Daka's *juju* palaver that gave to his weird machinations on the islands in Sleeping Creek one unquestionable point of interest.

Those of his victims who were marked for sacrifice did not die on the island on which Daka was staging his *juju* performance. Neither there nor anywhere near it. There was nothing so crude as plain throat cutting or *machete* slashing in Daka's repertoire. His sacrificial scapegoats died wherever they happened to be at the time and in the manner specified by Daka's *juju*.

Only their death screams sounded in Sleeping Creek!

Of course, no white man who bothered to listen to the chatter of the trading beaches took this seriously; not even Pilker, who had claimed that Daka, aside from being a hypnotist and a worker in black magic, was "just a cheap penny showman at best."

"What are you waiting for?" Lederby barked at Melvin suddenly. "I've told you I don't need you, haven't I? You fellows only come up here to devil my life—to spy upon me and give yourselves something to chatter about and carry downriver. If Pilker's alive, I'll find him! If he's dead—murdered—I'll find the man who did it. Find him and hang him! *Savez?*"

Melvin nodded.

"Yes, I think I do," he said significantly, and moved toward the screen door, herding the willing Galo ahead of him. "I'd have saved myself a trip if I had known you were already so well posted on Daka and his tricks."

"Posted!" Lederby's mouth twisted and he gave vent to a short and ugly laugh. "What do you fellows think I've been doing since I came up here? Think I've been drunk or asleep? Or both?" Another unflattering laugh and then a sneer. "I suppose you think this ruddy district is too rough for me—too raw, too mysterious, too—hunh! You think it has me rattled and whipped to a ragged edge! Damn your hide, Melvin! Why don't you say what you think?"

Melvin paused as the other man leaned sharply across the table.

"What do I think, Lederby?" he asked quietly.

"Think! I know ruddy well what you think—the whole kit and kiboodle of you! You think Pilker's dead. You're sure of it. And you're sure Daka killed him. You think I'm just as sure but am afraid to bring Daka to trial. Perhaps you think I'm afraid of his damned N'ri *juju*—his croc water gods and his midnight monkeyshines in the dark of the moon! And you brought this sniveling swine of a canoe boy up here to force my hand by showing me the horns of the ram on his back!"

Lederby came around the table suddenly, his red rimmed eyes aflame, his mouth twisting in a nasty and dangerous grin.

"Drunk, am I? Asleep, eh? Finished? Done for? Licked by a black and drunken gin swiller who says his prayers to a crocodile's teeth? That's what you think, Melvin! Isn't that what you think?"

Melvin looked into Lederby's blazing eyes and found there the unmistakable signs of conflict—of a ceaseless struggle between Lederby's acute sense of his own importance, and those fears of his that mocked him in the dark hours of his nights; not only his fear of Daka, if he really did fear Daka, but more particularly his fear of loneliness, of defeat and of the threat of eternal inconsequence.

Lederby knew perfectly well just how little he mattered in Loano; little to the service he represented and still less perhaps to both black and white in the district he was supposed to govern. Consequently Lederby was struggling desperately for his place in the sun; for his fellowmen to point to him and say, "That's Lederby. *The* Lederby. They all thought he was finished, but . . ."

"All right," Melvin said, looking straight into the heart of the struggle that raged in Lederby's eyes. "I won't argue

with you. But what are you going to do about it? Show me I'm all wrong."

Lederby winced, stepped back a pace and paused. Obviously he had not expected this. Melvin's altogether too naked honesty was not the sort of thing he had become accustomed to since the Koraba affair. Since then, men had commiserated with him to his face and behind his back had sneered and laughed and relegated him to the discard with a contemptuous verbal flip or, worse still, with just a shrug of the shoulders or the expressive lift of an eyebrow.

And the fires of Lederby's own private hell never lacked for fuel. He had but to think and every thought brought an armful of tinder to the flames.

"Show you you're all wrong," he said thickly, as if he were trying to realize that Melvin had really come out flat footed with the truth. "You think I'm afraid of my job, eh? Of Daka? And his ruddy ram's horn *juju?*" Lederby looked blearily at Melvin for several long and silent seconds, then slowly shook his head, paused and shook his head again. "No, Melvin. Nothing like that. I know I'm afraid. Scared stiff. But it isn't Daka or his *juju* I'm afraid of. I'm going after Daka tonight and I'm going to get him tonight—if I can stay drunk enough. *Savez?* If I can stay drunk enough!"

"What do you mean?" Melvin asked sharply. "That you need the help of liquor to—"

And Lederby, much to Melvin's surprise, put a suddenly fatherly and benevolent hand on his shoulder.

"No, not the *help* of liquor, Melvin. The *restraint* of liquor is what I need for this job."

"What!" Melvin frankly gaped. "Are you just drunk or—"

"No." Lederby abruptly withdrew the benevolent and fatherly hand. "Not drunk enough. Not half." He turned to the table quickly, poured himself another brandy, held it up and said, "Here's to the iron hand, the hangman and the rope."

And, having drunk this toast while Melvin stared a little more, he put the glass down and said with a note of challenge in his voice—

"Want to come along and see the performance?

"I?"

"Surely. Why not? You're not afraid of *juju* palaver, are you?"

Melvin's eyes lighted up with an almost indecent anticipation and his hand went instinctively toward his hip pocket where he carried a stubby automatic.

"You mean we're going after Daka tonight? Now?"

"Just as soon as I'm drunk enough. About three more drinks of this stuff . . ."

TWO hours later, still staring in pardonable unbelief, Melvin found himself following Lederby along a bush path that led in the general direction of Sleeping Creek.

A little in advance of Lederby, the broad naked feet of a khaki clad Yoruba private in the Southern Nigerian Regiment of the W. A. F. F. (West African Frontier Force) led the way, with Galo, the canoe boy, scuffling along at his elbow. And behind Melvin came another Yoruba and two members of the native constabulary.

The Yoruba and the policemen carried rifles, Lederby's service revolver was in its holster, and Melvin had his automatic and his golf cleek. As for the balance of Lederby's little force of Yoruba soldiermen, they had not returned from attending to the "bit of private business" Lederby had referred to, and Lederby did not seem to care whether they ever did or not.

In fact, Lederby did not seem to care very much about anything except the flask of brandy he carried with him and the words of certain verses that described the hanging of Danny Deever.

Lederby was undeniably drunk and he was apparently determined to stay that way.

However, his step did not falter, his head sat as stiffly on his shoulders as that of a guardsman, and his voice, though thick, harsh and unlovely in disposition,

did not fool with words or indulge in any kind of circumlocution.

Melvin, assisted by his golf cleek, strode behind Lederby and marveled. At the same time he wondered how drunk Daka was going to be.

Certainly the possibilities in the situation were promising.

Lederby, however, did not appear to be giving this a thought. When he found that the words of "Danny Deever" eluded him, he asked Melvin gruffly without turning his head—

"How high did they hang Haman?"

"Shh! Not so loud," Melvin cautioned. "Daka probably has these parts sown with spies."

"Has he?" Lederby asked without lowering his voice in the slightest. "And what difference does that make? They don't know who Haman was anyway. Do you know?"

Melvin smiled in spite of himself and their situation.

"He was—oh, you'll find the story in the Book of Esther."

"Hunh." A pause. "And when you hang a man as high as Haman, how high is that?"

"I don't remember."

Lederby grunted, strode along a dozen yards or so in silence, then persisted as if the subject bothered him.

"Why was Haman hung so high? I've been hearing the expression 'hung as high as Haman' all my life but never bothered to look it up. Does the Book of Esther tell how high Haman was hung? Eh? And why he was hung that high? Does it tell all that?"

Melvin was not smiling now. Neither were the Yoruba, nor the native policemen. If Lederby continued to chatter like this . . .

"Does it?" Lederby demanded. "Why don't you answer me? What the devil are you afraid of?"

Melvin stiffened just a little.

"If I remember correctly," he said in a low voice that was more precisely informative than he realized, "the exact height of Haman's gallows is given in the Book of Esther. Haman built it for Esther's uncle, Mordecai, but was hanged on it himself instead."

"He was!" Lederby's voice lifted to still more perilous heights. "That must be a damned good story!"

Melvin waited a moment and listened.

"It is," he said briefly.

"Hunh." Lederby strode steadily along. "Dramatic justice. Planned to hang somebody he didn't like and found the rope around his own—ugh!" Lederby halted in his tracks most abruptly, took another drink of brandy from his flask and then demanded of Melvin suspiciously, "How do you happen to know so much about it? I didn't know you were a bookworm."

Melvin smiled a patient smile.

"I'm not a scholar if that's what you mean. But I was born north of Inverness and that just naturally made me fairly well acquainted with at least one book. Come on, Lederby, let's get moving along. If you're going to hang Daka as high as Haman—"

"Who said I was? Did I say anything about hanging him? Did I?"

"The thought was in your mind," Melvin said cannily.

"How do you know that? How the devil do you know what's in my mind? I haven't said I was going to hang Daka. I said I was going to get him tonight. Get him. That was all. Not a word about hanging him. Not a damned word."

"No?"

"No!"

"Then why are you thinking about Danny Deever and Haman—hanged men both of them?"

"Hanged men! Why am I—" Lederby laughed shortly and harshly and spun about, striding forward again with an abruptness that was rather disconcerting. Also, he had nothing to say for several minutes. But Melvin noted that the district commissioner's hand fumbled uneasily about his throat and neck.

"Said nothing about hanging him," Lederby mumbled doggedly after awhile,

more to himself than to any one else. "Not a word."

"You'll have to hang him if you catch him," Melvin said in a low, insidious voice. "You know very well Pilker's isn't the only blood on his hands."

"Do I?"—gruffly and sullenly.

"Of course you do. And you'll have to do the job yourself."

"Eh? What job?"

"The hanging job. There's no sheriff in Loano. You are judge and jury and hangman and—"

"Shut up!" Again Lederby halted, his hand fumbling at his throat as if he were choking and was trying to pull something away from it to give him a chance to breathe. "You know too much. Too much altogether."

Melvin was afraid he did, and nodded understandingly under cover of the dark. Evidently Lederby had not much stomach for the nasty official duty of actually putting the noose about Daka's neck with his own hands and thereafter seeing to it that Daka dropped in the approved fashion and "hanged by the neck until he was dead".

"Never mind what I know," Melvin said placatingly. "Let's keep moving. If we're going to catch Daka tonight, or any night, we'll have to catch him napping, and we're chattering enough and making enough noise to— Shh! What was that?"

Even Lederby, drunk as he was, jerked his head up to listen to the sudden long, low cry that lifted itself into the night; a cry of pain or of savage ecstasy, it was difficult to tell which, that trailed off into a throbbing, vanishing whimper, not at all unlike the tremulous tones of a saxophone.

Galo, the canoe boy, and the Yoruba who marched with him also had stopped in their tracks; they began to edge sidewise back to their white masters.

"Be him!" Galo whispered shiveringly to Melvin. "Be Daka! He catch gin too much. Plenty soon some man go die!"

"Shut up, you little fathead," Lederby growled, and both he and Melvin peered everywhere about them through the tangle of jungle growth for the trace of a light. Then Lederby swung upon the Yoruba soldier who, with the two native policemen, was bringing up the rear. "Is this the place where Daka make water *juju?*"

"Yessah," Galo whispered before the Yoruba had a chance to say anything. "Be dis place! Daka *savez* water *juju* too much. He kill black man all time foh water *juju!*"

Lederby ignored Galo and continued to look heavily toward the Yoruba for official information.

"Yessah," the soldier said. "Be dis place Corp'ral Bedao look out foh Daka proper foh dis time."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so," Lederby grunted, and turned a heavy sodden eye upon Melvin. "You heard what he said about my corporal?"

"He's watching Daka?" Melvin queried.

Lederby nodded skeptically.

"I hope so. But I think he's a damned fool and Daka has probably fed him and his squad to the crocs by this time."

The district commissioner took another drink; a good long one; and when he had wiped his mouth with absurdly meticulous care and had put the flask away again, he said, as if he were speaking in strictest confidence:

"You know, Melvin, this fellow Daka is clever. He's never as drunk as you think he is and—"

"Are you?" Melvin interrupted quietly.

"I?" Lederby swayed a little. "I do my best, but it's never good enough to satisfy me. I'm always reaching out a little further, but I never quite— What are we chattering about? What business is it of yours how drunk I am? Confound you, Melvin—"

Again that throbbing cry—weird, uncanny and fearsome—lifted and hung and died in a thick and throaty sob of anguish.

Galo, the canoe boy, whined like a frightened puppy and huddled nearer to Melvin, and the native policemen drew similarly closer to Lederby. The sphinx faced Yoruba soldiers stood aloof, pretending not to be in the least affected, but

Melvin noted that their rifles were held stiffly in readiness for any emergency and that their trigger fingers were perhaps just a little too nervous for action.

"Hunh," Lederby grunted. "Sounded as if he'd cut a throat. Come on, Melvin. I think this is going to be a rotten show, but—"

Yet another eery cry, more shrill, more terrible than any that had gone before trailed lingeringly off in a pulsating whimper of appeal; an appeal that was drowned by a thunderous pig-like squeal of rage or surprise or both.

"That sounded like hippo," Melvin said.

"What the devil's he up to tonight?" Lederby demanded. "I thought his specialty was crocs."

"Oh, he may have gotten tired of seeing his victims being swallowed," Melvin suggested dryly, "and is having them mashed for a change. I hope he hasn't started a herd of hippos dancing on your corporal."

"Ugh! That's a messy idea. I'd better have another drink."

LEDERBY had more than one drink before his leading Yoruba and Galo dipped gingerly into a path that, scarcely wider than a barrel hoop, led darkly down to the edge of the creek that was known to Galo as Ehere-ila-ula, but which became interpreted by white men as Sleeping Creek. Lederby knew it principally as a hell of a place for mosquitoes.

It was something less than a hundred yards wide—deep, sluggish, black and mangrove bound, with long, lean islands lifting their sandy shores above the waters for crocodiles to bask upon. Even in the daytime the creek wore its mask of sleep—the kind of sleep that, in the native mind at least, needed no pillow and knew nothing of the morning.

The path they had followed led down to the water's edge under cover of a screen of mangroves and the leading Yoruba presently reported to Lederby in a breathing whisper—

"Canoe live foh dis place, sah."

"Hunh,"—grudgingly. "One up for Corporal Bedao. You hear, Melvin? Our carriage waits." Then to the Yoruba, "Anybody in it?"

"Kofi, sah."

Lederby and Melvin moved nearer to the water's edge and peered down at the solitary, khaki clad figure in the canoe. If Melvin's ears did not deceive him, Private Kofi's teeth were chattering, and for a moment or two he seemed to be utterly unable to give voice to a syllable. Evidently he had had a bad time of it sitting all alone in that canoe waiting for Lederby to arrive, but when he did find his tongue, whispering Yoruba gutturals came forth in a flood.

Presently Lederby and Melvin learned that Corporal Bedao and his squad were on the other side of the creek in another canoe and that Daka was making very bad and forbidden *juju* on his favorite island in midstream.

Daka, apparently, did not always choose the same island. It depended on his humor. But his humor was always more devilish than usual when his fires and his spectral, phosphorescent lights began to flare on this island to the accompaniment of the screams of those victims of his who were supposed to die so suddenly and mysteriously at various points remote from Sleeping Creek.

According to report, principally the whispered report of trading beach gossip, there had been nothing monotonously uniform about the manner in which those victims of Daka had died.

Most of them, it was true, had been reported drowned; had had a kind of fit, which was generally preceded by a burst of murderous temper, and had fallen out of their canoes or off a wharf, or breakwater, or the bank of a creek into the water.

A few, however, were reported to have been the victims of snake bite or something of the sort; one had fallen into an animal trap and had broken his neck; another had had his burst of bad temper late at night on the waterfront of a trad-

ing beach, had tried to kill several people and had been almost decapitated by an indignant Accra cook who had defended himself with a cleaver.

But all of them, according to the same whispered, superstitious report, had signaled the coming of the end by the long drawn out strangling cry that sounded above Daka's island on Sleeping Creek. And all of them, of course, had Daka's mark between their shoulder blades—the mark of a V which Lederby claimed was not a V, but was intended to represent the horns of a ram.

"All right," Lederby said, stepping into the canoe. "We go look Daka one time. Plenty man live foh island?"

"Plenty man live, sah," Kofi said. "And all man go craze. Daka *juju* be bad *juju* foh black man, sah."

Lederby grunted deprecatingly as he made room for Melvin.

"Seems to have the quality of keeping them damned quiet. Except for those ungodly screams—hunh! Wonder how he works that trick."

"Perhaps he's a ventriloquist?" Melvin suggested and allowed the shivering Galo to huddle at his feet and hang on to his golf cleek, while the Yoruba and the policemen became paddle boys for a change.

"Rats," Lederby disagreed impatiently, and went on as if in defense of an unpublished and wholly unsuspected theory of his own. "He's a child of Neptune and the sun—a worshiper of fire and a slave to firewater—and because the sun is in its exaltation in Aries, he sacrifices in the name of the ram—"

"The ram?" Melvin interrupted, because Lederby's repeated reference to the ram bothered him. "Why the ram? What are you talking about, Lederby?"

Lederby's arm brushed across his eyes and he mumbled an order to Kofi to get under way. Then he reached for his flask and laughed a thick, forced laugh.

"I'm just chattering, Melvin, and am possibly all wrong in any case." He raised the flask with a grandiose gesture. "But when Mars wrestles with Neptune, one usually has another drink. One very possibly has two drinks. Chin-chin."

Melvin said nothing. His acquaintance with the much abused, age-old science of astrology was of the vaguest and he was quite sure Lederby was too drunk to know what he was talking about anyway.

Also, as the canoe's nose pointed silently out from behind the screen of mangroves a sudden blue-green phosphorescent flare of light leaped from one of the islands in midstream into the black dark overhead—leaped and sank and leaped and sank again, and a sound like a whispering sigh hissed weirdly across the waters of Sleeping Creek.

The island was no great distance away —scarcely more than a stone's throw— and presently, among the gaunt outlines of a few lanky palms, the wraith-like shadows of two-legged creatures with oddly curving horns became visible every time the ghostly lights flared from a central platform, or dais, around which the whole performance seemed to be taking place.

As Melvin was able to observe after the canoe had crept stroke by stroke, nearer and still nearer, a dance of some sort was in progress; a silent affair in which the scuffing of the horned creatures' feet and the very light, whispering clap of their hands were the only sounds the dancers made.

That the horns were affixed to the crinkly heads of men, Melvin, of course, never had any doubt; men who danced with heads lowered, head to head, and every now and then allowed their heads to come together with a gradually increasing thwack that, instead of slowing up the measure of the dance, seemed only to intensify the dancers' eagerness to go on and on indefinitely.

Instead of the customary loincloth they wore a scanty square of hide, scarcely bigger than an upper Niger sandal; but at the knees, elbows, shoulders and ankles, they were adorned with generous tufts of woolly looking fur, and around the neck and the right wrist they wore circlets of the same woolly material; while between

the horns that curved backward from the temples was a chalk-white mark or piece of white cloth with a black spot in the middle of it.

Melvin grasped the greater part of this picture in little flashes of revelation that lived for just a moment or two and then vanished, with that eery whispering sound, into the dark again.

Galo, whimpering at Melvin's feet as the canoe drew nearer and nearer to the island, was giving every indication of being likely to jump overboard in a panic of fear; and Lederby, who appeared to have sunk into a state of drunken disregard for the whole business and who seemed to be paying no attention to anything, least of all to Galo, suddenly leaned forward and grabbed the canoe boy by the shoulder just as he lunged upward and sidewise in frenzied terror.

"Down!" Lederby grunted thickly. "Watch him, Melvin, will you? Maybe there's a way of beating the damned stuff. There's usually an antidote and—"

"What stuff?" Melvin whispered, taking a firm grip on Galo's other shoulder. "What are you talking about now?"

"Never mind. If he tries that again, club him with that golf cleek."

Again Melvin relapsed into thoughtful silence; this time with a conviction that Lederby was not just chattering after all; that he very probably never did chatter except to please himself and for a good political reason, and that Lederby drunk was much more wide awake than the majority of men in their most sober moments.

A sudden broader flare of blue-green light leaped and spread above the *juju* island and, for a few fleeting moments, sketched before Melvin's eyes the first sharp outlines of a picture that, with each succeeding leap of the ghostly light, became a finished painting as he watched.

Upon the central platform, which revealed itself presently as a square built mound something less than six feet in height, the grotesque but dominating figure of a man sat enthroned on a circular chair that had no legs, but was just a section of a mango or mahogany log that had been trimmed and had had a seat cut into it.

The individual who was thus enthroned —and Melvin had no doubt that it was Daka—wore horns similar to the dancers except that his horns were bigger and were part of a crudely made mask that was intended to be the face of a ram.

At once Melvin thought sharply of what Lederby had had to say about the horns of the ram; and then a second look at the enthroned priest—or whatever the ram headed Daka was supposed to be—made Melvin think also of an Egyptian hieroglyphic and finally and more specifically of an Egyptian god.

Osiris? No. Horus? No. Ra? Ra, the sun god? Maybe that was it. Melvin could not remember what kind of head Ra had had in the book that had been a special favorite of his mother, and anathema to his father, who had been a sternly precise elder of the kirk and to whom even the pictures of other men's gods . . . But this wasn't Egypt, in any event. This was Nigeria—in the heart of the jungle—black, primitive, remote, thousands of years farther back than the civilization that had lived in the shadow of the Pyramids.

Nevertheless . . . for all that . . . just like a hieroglyphic . . . a god of some remote Egyptian origin.

Around Daka's neck Melvin saw a necklace of teeth, or chips of ivory, and the pendant that hung from this necklace and rested flat on Daka's chest was the crudely wrought figure of a fish that might just possibly have been twins. Melvin could not see plainly enough to be sure there were two fishes, but of one fish he was quite sure because the pendant was of shining tin or silver, and at least nine to twelve inches long.

And Daka's shoulders, elbows, knees and ankles, like those of the dancers, were ornamented with large tufts and circlets of woolly fur, while Daka's apron of hide, fastened well above the waist, seemed to be at least as expansive as a cobbler's. Also it bore strange markings

in white chalk or paint that Melvin could not, of course, at all clearly define at that distance.

Immediately in front of Daka was a low structure that bore some resemblance to a butcher's block; a block that was ornamented at each of the four corners with curving horns. And Daka, who seemed to preside over the whole proceedings, beat tirelessly upon this block with a flail-like whip that had several thongs—a dragging, measured beat that produced a curious whispering sound that was like a sigh.

Melvin suspected that the block was possibly hollow, a kind of sacred drum or tom-tom; and that the ceremony of beating upon it so tirelessly and so endlessly had something to do with deciding the speed of the dance which was becoming faster and faster, while the absurd whacking of heads undoubtedly was getting louder and louder and more staggeringly effective.

WHETHER Daka had outposts or guards to protect him and the members of his cult from being spied upon was not apparent, and the nearer the canoe drew to the sandy shores of the little island without any evidence of occasioning alarm of any sort, the more Melvin began to suspect that a show was being put on for their special benefit—the kind of thing that was usually staged for the edification of white visitors—particularly government officials.

And presently, as the canoe's nose grounded in the shadow of a clump of cactus and wine palms that blotted out most of Melvin's picture, Lederby growled sourly:

"Told you it was going to be a rotten show. Just another dance and— Damn it, Melvin, can't you hang on to that little fool? Get him! Don't let him—"

Galo was on his feet trying to escape by going overboard into the water. He was obviously crazy with terror, but an all too sudden maniacal frenzy of resentment against any interference seemed to have seized him, and before any one realized that there was such a thing as fight in his scrawny body, he had wrenched the golf cleek out of Melvin's hand and began laying about him with the business end of it.

Only the uncertainty of Galo's footing in the wabbling canoe saved Melvin and one of the native policemen from a split skull. As it was the policeman sat down again very suddenly and had little or no further interest in Galo or anything else for several minutes.

So unusual and unexpected was the canoe boy's attack that Melvin was utterly taken by surprise and gave no thought just then to its significance; not even when Galo, finally pinioned by Lederby and a Yoruba, suddenly emitted a long, shrill cry of agony that died in a throaty, gurgling sob, as stiffening sharply, the canoe boy lifted high on his toes, then sagged against Lederby like a falling log.

"Confound the luck! Why couldn't he have waited till—"

Lederby's growling voice was drowned by another cry—more shrill, more agonizing, more blood chilling than Galo's—a cry that came from beyond the clump of cactus and palms—from out of the middle of the dance—and flung its weirdly echoing message of death into the blackness overhead.

Then silence.

Silence in the canoe and silence beyond the cactus and the palms. Even the whispering of the dance had died into the quiet that hung with a smothering heaviness over Sleeping Creek.

A few seconds of this; awesome, breath taking and capable of producing almost any kind of climactic effect. And then, from the other side of the island, like a startled and utterly spontaneous cry for help, there came the short, sharp blast of a police whistle. Then another and another, followed by a shot and a bleating uproar—a crackling, tearing chaos that rent the quiet of Sleeping Creek.

Lederby swore, but hesitated not at all. He slung the stiff, almost board-like figure

of Galo over his shoulder with a nonchalance that was as decisive as it was gruesome and was out of the canoe in an instant.

"Come on, Melvin! And shoot if you have to. Edge, Kofi, edge! Keep your eye out for Daka all time."

The district commissioner of Loano was swinging around the clump of cactus before Melvin or Kofi properly realized that he had even started, but Melvin followed as rapdily as he could, being careful to retrieve the fallen golf cleek that had slipped from Galo's nerveless fingers. He also snatched his automatic from his hip pocket and, unmindful of such a trifle as wet feet, jumped from the canoe and plunged after Lederby.

The police and Yoruba soldiers followed Melvin, but followed cautiously.

And when Melvin had rounded the interfering cactus and palms, the scene that spread itself out before his eyes in the spasmodic flare of the blue-green light was one of almost indescribable chaos, with the solitary god-like figure with a ram's head, sitting stiffly in the center of the confusion staring—or seeming to stare —at the horned block before him; a block that was no longer a block, but looked something like a collapsed accordion.

All about this figure, other figures with horns tied to their heads with a strip of white cloth, milled and swayed and broke up into little isolated groups that whirled and broke again and scurried back to the central body—just like sheep in a pen, aimlessly crowding, aimlessly breaking and butting each other as they had done in the dance, all the while uttering cries that, though not particularly animal-like in sound, had the animal-like quality of being confined to a single note. A queer, plaintive note that, if one's imagination were willing to make concessions, might have been said to resemble the bleat of a lamb.

There was an uncanny unreality about the whole business that made Melvin figuratively rub his eyes and look again and yet again.

Evidently, too, on the face of things, Daka had been taken by surprise, or else he had had one drink too much on this occasion. Or perhaps, having staged a show for Lederby's benefit, with all the braggadocio and confidence of which he was capable, something unforeseen had happened to upset all his calculations. For, if ever defeat and dejection crowded down upon the shoulders of a god, they certainly weighed heavily enough then upon the shoulders of Daka, high priest of the cult of the ram.

The approach of Lederby with Galo slung over his shoulder, the milling sheep in their grotesque regalia that clothed them not at all, the presence of Corporal Bedao and his squad in the rear, and Melvin himself, backed by hesitating Yoruba and police—none of this seemed to interest Daka in the least.

His chin, sunk upon his chest, rested upon the large fish-like pendant that hung from a necklace of miscellaneous teeth; his hands rested limply on his knees and his whole attention was apparently glued on the giant "accordion" that looked so flat and lifeless, the flail-like whip lying idly across it in the same spirit of voiceless inaction.

Lederby, gun in hand, stiff of neck and as if he were walking a chalkline, strode straight up to the fringe of the milling, bleating "children of the ram" and seemed prepared to stride straight through them to the foot of Daka's throne.

But, without antagonism and without seeming to have any mind of their own in the matter, they simply crowded closer and closer together, allowing Lederby to approach only a yard or two nearer to the man who, even in his posture of defeat or debasement, dominated the whole scene.

Lederby eyed the sheep-like little mob a moment or two, then leveled his gun at it promiscuously.

"Edge! Go 'way! One time!"

No one answered this. No one moved to obey. They simply huddled closer together and their monotoned cry whimpered more plaintively to Daka for help or guidance of some sort. They appeared to have no initiative of their own and

that they might make a bolt for it and thus escape the possible displeasure of the white man's law did not seem to occur to any of them. They moved in a body, cried out in a body and functioned so generally *en masse* that Melvin got a sudden decided impression that they were hypnotized.

This thought recalled Pilker's assertion that Daka killed by hypnotic suggestion, and he sidled quickly up to Lederby's side and whispered—

"Look as if they were hypnotized, don't they?"

"Of course they are," Lederby growled as if it were no news to him. "And Daka's too full of his own brand of sleepy stuff to take 'em out of it."

"Sleepy stuff? You mean morphine or something?"

"Or something," Lederby said impatiently. "He's a medicine man, isn't he? Makes the stuff himself—whatever it is—and sometimes feeds it to the people he doesn't like when they're not looking."

Lederby laughed shortly and, before Melvin could make any further comment, he shouted an order to Corporal Bedao to wake Daka up and suggested that the point of a bayonet would be a good alarm clock.

However, ere Bedao could put the suggestion into execution or Melvin was able to appreciate Lederby's Bacchanalian humor at its full value, Daka's head came up and his hands stirred on his knees just as if he were actually coming out of a drug bound stupor that still held him in its grip.

"What you do foh dis place?" he asked thickly from behind his ram's head mask. "Dis no be gov'ment palaver. This be black man god palaver."

"Make all man go 'way," Lederby ordered. "You and me go talk medicine palaver foh dead man."

"Dead man!" Daka threw his head back, and the sound of thick black laughter filled the shadows of Sleeping Creek. "Dead man be dead man. He no hab no use foh med'cine."

"Bedao!" Lederby's voice had a harsh and unmistakable note in it.

"Yessah."

"Make all man put bayonet around Daka neck, all same beads."

"Ye—yessah," Corporal Bedao answered dubiously and doubtfully, then crackled an order to his squad.

Daka cursed Lederby and Bedao and all men, white or black, in his own tongue and in pidgin English. He damned Lederby's interference, his authority and his threats, and in the midst of the tirade while bayonets clicked into their sockets and just before a necklace of shiny steel climbed up behind Daka and flung itself around his neck, there was the sudden tearing sound of a shot and Daka almost lost one of his horns.

"Make all man go 'way one time!" Lederby ordered without even glancing at his smoking gun.

Daka paused. He was either very drunk or he was still winding his way through a fog that was engendered by drugs, or fear, or both. The whine of the bullet, however, did not seem to bother him to any great extent, but the necklace of bayonets that hung close enough to prick his neck if he moved too carelessly —that was different. Daka did not like cold steel and Lederby apparently knew it. In fact, Lederby appeared to know a great deal more about Daka and his habits than any one in Loano would have suspected, least of all Melvin and his contemporaries in trade.

With a grudging gesture or two and a string of orders and cries in his own tongue, Daka dispersed the huddling little mob about him and flung it to right and left of him just as if he had picked up two handfuls of pawns and tossed them wherever he willed.

There was little or no confusion. Also the bleating, monotoned cry stopped instantly, and in its place came at once the sound of voices — human voices — the voices of timid, frightened, child-like men who, released from their trance-like bondage, stared and gaped and whispered stupidly among themselves, still too

dazedly subjective to take any action on their own account.

LEDERBY moved forward, almost to the edge of the mound on which Daka and his horned "accordion" and steaming, bubbling pots were elevated and, slinging the stiff figure of Galo from his shoulder, he laid the canoe boy on the ground face down.

"I bring you Galo—your canoe boy. He catch your mark. The mark of the horns. So!" Lederby pointed dramatically to the V shaped mark between Galo's shoulder blades, and further illustrated the precise kind of mark by drawing it with his finger in space. "He catch sick in my canoe. Maybe so he done die. You catch medicine foh him?"

Daka leaned forward sharply—a truly grotesque figure with his ram's head mask and his necklace of bayonets—and stared down at the mark between Galo's shoulder blades. Then he laughed and tried to throw his head back to do it, but found that the points of at least three bayonets did not make laughter very pleasurable. So he stopped laughing and cursed instead. Then he asked with braggart defiance, pointing at Galo's back—

"You say be my mark?"

"You make um. You make um for plenty man back."

"How you *savez* I make um? How you *savez* dat?"

As Daka spoke, something in the defiant arrogance of his tone made Melvin look, not at Daka, but at Lederby.

And he found that Lederby's face was gray and drawn as if all the life had been drained out of it. Lederby's eyes had a staring look in them and, for a moment or two, he seemed actually afraid to answer. Then he found his tongue again, suddenly, harshly, as if he were speaking through a frothy gathering in his throat.

"Be you make that medicine. Be you make mark. If he is dead—you go die one time! My Yoruba cut your throat like li'l bit pig! *Savez?*"

A choking cry of protest escaped Daka, a cry of horror that was as involuntary as it was hauntingly real. He was not afraid to die. His whole life had been lived in vicious contempt of death; but the sharp pointed ring of steel around his neck—to die like that even if he doubted if Lederby dared carry out his threat . . . Daka paused.

He was in a trap and he knew it. Evidently he realized that, however long delayed Lederby's action had been, he now meant business and that he, Daka, at that moment, was on trial for his life, just as much as if this island of his were a courtroom in Onitsha or Warri.

In Loano a district commissioner held court wherever and whenever he had reason to bring any one to trial; and in the district of Loano, as Melvin had suggested, the district commissioner was a czar, with unquestioned power of life or death over his subjects—even to the grim privilege of hanging them with his own hands if he decided the occasion demanded it.

Daka knew this. He had, with drunken, braggart laughter, practised his nefarious black magic in defiance of the law too long not to know it; and now he seemed to realize that at last Lederby was just drunk enough to pass sentence upon him and—as Daka saw it—hurl his mutilated spirit across the border of spirit land into the blackest pit of eternal damnation.

Melvin saw the change in Daka's attitude quite plainly, just as plainly as he saw the ashen pallor that lay on Lederby's cheeks and lips and the staring look that was in Lederby's eyes.

Both men, the white and the black, were face to face with a climax; with the grim necessity of deciding, not only the fate of Galo, the canoe boy, but also the fate of each other.

There was, in fact, a queer, underlying tensity in the whole situation that Melvin did not altogether grasp; particularly Lederby's end of it. And of the two men Lederby seemed to be strung at the higher tension.

Of course, if Daka produced a medicine that would take Galo out of the death-

like state into which he had passed, he would tacitly confess that he was aware of the cause of Galo's condition and virtually that he had been responsible for it. And if he did not produce such medicine and Galo were really dead . . .

Melvin did not see how Daka could possibly win, or how Lederby could possibly lose. And yet, of the two men . . .

Lederby's flask came forth once more, and the drink he took was a long one. It brought a little color back to his face, but the terrific strain he was under was plainly indicated by the absence of any wordy reaction to the brandy. He was too tense to speak; too taut in every nerve and sinew to do anything but wait—until he could wait no longer. And when that moment came Melvin was afraid Lederby would probably do something for which he would pay with a lifetime of regret.

It was that kind of moment; sinister, insidious, veiled by a thin restraint that was likely to be torn to shreds any second and reveal—what?

Melvin shivered. There was something about the atmosphere of Sleeping Creek that gave a man the feeling of being in touch with the unseen; something like a cemetery or a morgue.

"Maybe so I catch medicine foh dat sick palaver."

The voice was Daka's, hoarse and muffled, but as he spoke he put his hands behind his head and removed his ram's head mask, revealing his lean, besotted face which was principally remarkable for the shining black gleam that was in the eyes.

"Bring um," Lederby said in a low voice that suddenly rose to a snapping bark. "Bring medicine one time!"

Daka did not stir. He smiled, and again Melvin felt a chill run down his spine.

"Suppose I bring um," Daka suggested cautiously, as if he were trading a puncheon of palm oil. "What you go do?"

"Bring um!"

"Suppose I make Galo wake up proper —Yoruba man go cut my throat all same li'l pig? Huh?" Daka leaned forward, his gleaming eyes boring into Lederby's. "You go kill me all same?"

Daka's sneering smile broadened.

"Galo die, I die. Galo live, you go kill me all same. No be so?"

"Bring medicine! Bring um, damn you!"

Daka laughed, not broadly or loudly, but a laugh that sneered at everything Lederby was or stood for.

"I wait li'l bit," Daka said calmly, too calmly. "Then, maybe so, I bring med'cine foh Galo."

Lederby's whole body tensed. Melvin could see him quiver and strain as if at any moment he would leap forward and drag Daka from his throne with his own naked hands. There was about Lederby's whole attitude, in that instant, something strangely reminiscent of Galo when he had had his so sudden burst of maniacal frenzy in the canoe, and Melvin remembered sharply what Lederby had said earlier in the evening about the "restraint of liquor".

Certainly Lederby was restraining himself then; a restraint that was actually painful to watch, because Melvin, himself, could feel that tension to such an extent that his own arms and legs and the nerves of his neck ached with the reality of it.

"Bedao!" Lederby's voice was low and whispery.

"Yessah."

"Stand clear! All man—stand clear!"

"Yessah."

The necklace of bayonets departed from about Daka's neck, and Lederby's gun went slowly, very slowly back into its holster. The fingers of Lederby's hands curved and his arms reached out and up.

"Daka!"

The leering smile on Daka's face faded slowly.

"Come down!"

Daka did not move. The whites of his eyes showed brightly, and the arrogant assurance that had been his was departing every second.

"And die!"

Melvin gaped a petrified moment or two.

"Lederby!" He sprang forward and touched Lederby's shoulder. "Lederby! Are you crazy?"

"Keep away! Away! Damn you, Melvin! Can't you see!"

Melvin blinked. See what? That Lederby was going out of his head? Crazy with passion; a passion to tear Daka from his throne and strangle him with his bare hands. But why?

"Come down, damn you! Down!"

"Lederby! For God's sake, Lederby, you can't—Lederby! Wait! Look! Lederby!"

Lederby had leaped across Galo straight toward Daka, and as he leaped, his clawing hands reaching upward—Galo stirred!

The canoe boy's arms moved, his body quivered, and his head lifted a little, and with a convulsive shudder the queer stiffness went out of him and he rolled slowly over on his back.

Melvin stared down at the phenomenon an instant and Galo stared up at Melvin. Then Melvin bounded after Lederby, who, leaping up at Daka, did not seem to realize either that Galo was not dead or that Daka had suddenly armed himself with an ugly looking Upper Niger knife.

Melvin and Corporal Bedao, from opposite directions, reached Daka's chair about the same time—at the moment that Daka struck and Lederby caught the descending arm with the talon-like fingers of his left hand, while his right darted for Daka's throat with lightning accuracy that suggested the strike of a snake.

Daka writhed and wriggled and strove to free his knife hand, but Lederby's grip held on to both arm and throat; and even when Melvin's golf cleek cracked Daka's knuckles and made him drop the knife, and both he and Corporal Bedao tried to wrench Lederby away, Lederby hung on, his eyes staring wildly, and the madness that was in him concentrating with terrible zeal on the avowed purpose of dragging Daka from his throne and strangling ing him with his naked hands.

Bedao called excitedly to his squad for help and help came; and presently Lederby's grip on Daka's throat was torn away.

Daka sagged, bent double and pitched from his throne across the giant "accordion", while Lederby, still struggling wildly, suddenly stiffened and stopped struggling altogether.

And then a cry of anguish—a long, wailing terrible cry lifted itself into the darkness that hung over Sleeping Creek—a cry that seemed to come from the deeps of Lederby's soul.

"Lederby!" Melvin's voice was barely a whisper. "Good Lord! Not *you!*"

Lederby's cry died in a whimper that trailed off into a sigh and as he leaned sharply and stiffly against Melvin—a dead, log-like weight—Melvin gaped at Bedao whose staring frightened eyes had a waiting, listening look in them.

But Bedao and every one else who listened listened in vain.

There was no answering cry.

The magician of Sleeping Creek lay inertly across the horned "accordion" and the mysterious, echoing wailing of death was smothered and stilled; then and forever after.

Lederby, district commissioner of Loano —formerly of Sapeli, Segwanga and even of Warri—was the last of the high priest's victims to be sacrificed on the horns of the ram.

POSSIBLY, in the interest of dramatic effect, the story should end here with the curtain running down on that hauntingly grotesque picture of a nether world in the truly African blackness and silence of Sleeping Creek.

But there was yet another act in this drama—an act in which the characters were few and the props principally a mosquito curtained bed and a collapsed "accordion" with horns.

The bed was Lederby's at his headquarters, and Lederby lay upon it in a kind of cataleptic state for a longer time than Melvin cared to think about. He remained in this state much longer than

Galo had done and the beat of his heart was so negligible that Melvin doubted, most of the time, if it beat at all.

For awhile Galo squatted on the floor of Lederby's bedroom and watched. And this perhaps was the most incongruous phase of the whole business. For Galo was unquestionably alive. He looked as normal as if nothing whatever had happened to him; this, while Daka, the cause of it all, was bound hand and foot in the compound outside and Lederby lay upon the bed as if he would never wake up again.

Corporal Bedao had explained to Melvin that when Galo had so unexpectedly been stricken in the canoe and had given vent to his "death cry" almost under Daka's nose, Daka had seemed to be more surprised and more frightened than any one. Obviously, Daka had not expected any of his victims to demonstrate the effect of his *juju* so near at hand, and in the succeeding few seconds, according to Corporal Bedao's report of what he and his squad had seen, Daka seemed to have lost control of himself and the bellows-like arrangement that kept the "accordion" inflated. This bellows was connected to the flailing whip Daka had employed with such a carefully measured beat, and when he had lost his grip on the whip and it had fallen from his nerveless fingers, one of the first results of this had been the immediate deflation of the "accordion", with the subsequent echoing cry which the thing produced—a wholly involuntary cry on this occasion! And Daka, staring about him a moment or two in something akin to panic, had suddenly raised his ram's head mask a little and stuffed something into his mouth.

It was then that Corporal Bedao had blown the police whistle and then, too, that an excited member of his squad had allowed a nervous trigger finger to get out of control.

Daka had slumped in his seat and to all appearances, in the succeeding few minutes, had completely lost his grip, either because whatever he had swallowed had been too suddenly effective or—if stimulation had been his hope—it had not been effective enough. Melvin did not know. But, from Bedao's description, it was certainly clear that Daka had been the most surprised man on Sleeping Creek when Galo's "death cry" had competed at such close quarters with one of his most effective thunders.

The spasmodically flaring blue-green light that had been such an effective stage effect was produced, as Melvin discovered for himself, by nothing more exciting than a slow burning powder of phosphorescent quality that was laid out in a series of connected hillocks in an ironwood container that was ridged along the bottom. Every time a hillock "went off", the result was a blue-green flare; then followed a pause, while the thin connecting trail of powder carried its sputtering, slow burning spark to the next hillock. Then came another flare of light. It reminded Melvin somewhat of a kind of asthma powder an uncle of his had used, the only difference being that the asthma powder had produced spasmodic puffs of smoke, while Daka's contrivance regulated puffs of blue-green light.

Now Melvin sat beside Lederby's bed, waiting. He had done everything that could be done—everything he could think of—without any effect, and the nearest doctor was too far away to be of any immediate service. But when Melvin began to feel a sense of hopelessness coming over him, he took another look at Galo squatting on the floor; and when Galo presently rose, stretched his scrawny legs and announced, as canoe boys will under any circumstances, that his belly was hungry, Melvin's hopes for Lederby leaped anew.

So Galo went out to relieve his hunger and Melvin continued to smoke and to wait for the first flicker of life to come into Lederby's staring eyes.

It was about three A. M. that Daka died.

He died in silence, with a knife in his heart. His own knife.

Corporal Bedao, drowsing several feet away, heard nothing, but sat bolt upright suddenly and sharply ordered a vanishing shadow to halt. The shadow did not halt and Corporal Bedao fired.

He did not hit the shadow, but he did wake Lederby.

Just who it was who had chosen this occasion to dispose of Daka was never officially discovered. Galo, if any one had been in a state of mind to notice it, seemed to be unavoidably absent just then. But since the hullabaloo that accompanied and followed the shot sent a quivering, convulsive tremor of life through Lederby, as if he had received a kind of electrical shock, Melvin was too much occupied with the district commissioner in the succeeding hour or so to note Galo's absence from the compound or his return to his original squatting position on Lederby's bedroom floor.

Galo came in quietly and humbly as a good canoe boy should. He said nothing, did nothing, just squatted and waited for the commissioner to ask him more questions. Something in his face said he knew the answers to these questions beforehand, and this time, since Daka was quite dead . . .

"If I'd known that noise was what you needed," Melvin was saying ruefully when he explained to Lederby what all the shooting was about, "I'd have loaded that king's birthday cannon you have in your front yard. Instead, I've been sitting here for hours, ordering everybody to talk in whispers and walk on tip-toe. How do you feel now?"

Lederby smiled. It was not a very sure smile, but a smile nevertheless.

"That's at least the seventeenth time you have asked me that in—well, how many minutes is it since I came back to life?"

"About an hour. Do you really feel all right? Are you sure?"

Lederby sat up.

"What was that awful stuff you gave me to drink?"

"Just a little Scotch. It's a special brand I carry for emergencies."

"Hunh." Lederby sat on the edge of the bed. "This is no emergency, Melvin. This is a celebration. And if Lazarus could laugh, why not I? I have a small bottle of bubbly stuff I've been keeping—"

"No, Lederby, no," Melvin protested hurriedly. "It might bring it on again. Be careful, man. Don't do it. It's sleep you need. Real sleep. I'll warrant you haven't had a real night's sleep since that devil—since—well—"

"Since Daka marked me with the horns of the ram?"

Then Lederby, moving to a seat on the edge of the bed, looked at Galo a long and penetrating moment and asked—

"Daka done die?"

"Yessah."

"He done die proper?"

"Yessah. Some man kill um, sah."

Lederby nodded. His eyes searched Galo's face for even a faint sign of wavering and found none.

"Hunh. Maybe so you *savez* which man kill um?"

"No, sah."

"Maybe so you *savez* which man kill Pilker?"

"Yessah,"—quietly.

"Who?"

"Daka, sah."

Lederby looked at Melvin and Melvin returned the look with an understanding nod of the head, then added—

"I suppose, now that Daka's dead, you'll get all the evidence you want."

"No doubt about it." Lederby's glance shifted to Galo again. "How Daka kill Pilker?"

"He catch um foh canoe. He make fight palaver and sink um foh creek. All canoe boy fear Daka too much, and all canoe boy lie. But Daka kill all canoe boy, all same, sof'ly, sof'ly, li'l by li'l. Daka no good. Daka *savez* bad *juju* too much. All man glad Daka done die all same li'l bit pig."

Lederby nodded and shivered a little, then laughed.

"All right, Galo. Palaver set."

Galo rose promptly.

"Yessah. Palaver set, sah. I go sah. One time."

"Palaver set," Lederby assured him again and, without any hesitation, his brother of the rams departed.

LEDERBY'S glance followed the canoe boy's exit reflectively, then slowly came back to Melvin again.

"Did you ever get the Accra cook on a trading beach to get a zodiac ring for you? You know what I mean, don't you?"

"Surely. I never got one for myself, but I've had a few made for friends of mine at home. Why?"

"Ever occur to you to ask how these Accramen know anything about the zodiac?"

"Well, no; not exactly. I never bothered to think about it. Fact is, I don't know anything about the zodiac or astrology and—"

"Then I won't bore you with technicalities. What I'm getting at principally is that the ram I've been referring to this hectic evening, and which has been so emphatically referred to us, is the symbol of a period in the world's history. The Age of the Ram was the Age of Abraham; or, in other words, the ram that Abraham offered in sacrifice when he was allowed to release his son Isaac from the sacrificial altar, was the same ram symbolically speaking, that Daka represented on that island of his on Sleeping Creek."

Melvin stared, then laughed.

"Rubbish, Lederby. What did Daka know about Abraham or the Bible? You don't expect me to believe—"

"Nothing. What did Daka know of the sign Aries, the first sign of the zodiac, the symbol of which is the ram? Nothing. At least, not as we know it. Did Daka know that the sun, in astrology, is in its exaltation in Aries? I'm sure he didn't. Did he know that the twin fish he wore around his neck symbolized Pisces, the twelfth sign—the sign of the planet Neptune, and of drugs and hard liquor and poisons and mysticism? I don't think so. But he was the high priest of the cult of the ram for all that, and he was a hypnotist, a 'medicine man', a drug and liquor addict, and he did his dirty work with poisons of one sort or another."

"Yes—" doubtfully—"that's true. But how did all this come down from—from Abraham's time to *him?* From the land of Canaan to—to here?"

"Ask me an easier one. And in any event these things did not come from anywhere in particular to Sleeping Creek. I simply referred to the Age of Abraham because you were brought up on the Bible." Lederby smiled, then became almost solemn. "What we saw tonight, Melvin, had its origin over five thousand years ago—perhaps it goes back even to the Age of the Ram of the previous cycle. That's only thirty-odd thousand years ago. And what's a little matter of thirty thousand years in the life of Sleeping Creek?"

Lederby laughed shortly and leaned forward with an earnest, faraway look in his eyes.

"Think of it, Melvin! Like atoms of steel drawn to a magnet, like is drawn to like. Forces move us and we stick our prying noses into the infinite and we find—" he stopped and laughed again—"a V-shaped mark between our shoulder blades. The horns of the ram of sacrifice. And the agent of the planet Neptune, who puts them there, doesn't even know he was born under any sign of the zodiac. He thinks he is enjoying a good joke of his own at our expense and doesn't in the least realize that he is Destiny, blindly working the will of the trickiest, most insidiously dangerous planet in the heavens—the planet alike of champagne and square face gin, of the tragedian and the clown, of the prophet's vision and the opium smoker's dreams, of the highest ecstasy and of the lowest grimace of the street urchin who makes faces at the policeman behind his back! Old Neptune himself. Masquerader and medicine man. My Nemesis—and his."

"His?" Melvin repeated weakly. "Daka's, you mean?"

Lederby didn't answer for a moment or

two. He grinned sourly and shuddered a little. Then he went on in a lower, duller tone:

"I was sure he had killed Pilker and I thought I'd try to get his confidence—thought I'd trap him by good fellowship. And I drank with him, tried to get him drunk enough to talk and—well, when I woke up I was a brother ram!"

"He drugged your drinks!"

"Certainly. And made a thoroughly good job of it too. He made that ruddy mark on my back with the point of a knife or some such instrument, then rubbed some of his confounded ointment into the mess he'd made."

"Ointment!"

Lederby nodded glumly, then explained that the ointment, judging by its action contained a goodly percentage of *yaka* juice, which was a native drug producing a gradually increasing maniacal tendency of a violent order, and combined with this was some other agent which suddenly induced a state similar to catalepsy. It seemed to work with amazing accuracy exactly one month after the application—sometimes, however, on a bi-monthly basis—and Lederby had discovered that it was always applied in the last quarter of the moon.

The position of the "horns" between the shoulder blades indicated that its action was directly spinal, and since it did not work in Lederby's case with the passing of the first month, his mental agony during that second period of waiting for the poison to strike at his vitals was painfully simple to understand.

"Giving in to the violent inclinations engendered by the *yaka* juice appeared to excite the action of the cataleptic agent, and I kept myself drunk to try to keep myself in good humor. Liquor always makes me a good fellow. Never a grouch. When I'm drunk I'm as generous as Jupiter!"

Lederby's laughter this time was just a little bitter as he came sharply to his feet. Melvin also rose, and his eyes, because Lederby's back was turned toward him, all unconsciously sought the spot between the district commissioner's shoulder blades.

"Er—that is—when you found out what he'd done, why didn't you—"

"Arrest him?" Lederby spun sharply about. "What for? Making a laughing stock of me again? Isn't one Koraba affair enough in any man's life?"

"Hmm—well, I wasn't thinking of that," Melvin said quietly. "And I don't think you should either. Not so much. And Daka couldn't know about that, could he?"

"Couldn't he? He not only knew all about it, but he didn't gave a tinker's dam in any event. He had me where he wanted me. If I arrested him—if I strung him up—I lost whatever chance I had of finding the antidote to the devilish stuff, not only for myself but for others as well. I went to every medicine man I could find—N'ri men too, of Daka's breed—but they professed ignorance of the whole business and showed a wholesome fear of Daka and his cult."

Melvin nodded.

"I suppose so. And I don't imagine our own doctors—"

Lederby grinned, and something in his expression made Melvin pause, then ask:

"What is it? What's the joke?"

Lederby's grin broadened.

"I went to see Doc Foster down at Kalatown—three days there and back in a canoe in the last quarter of the moon. Understand?"

"You mean at the end of the first month of it?"

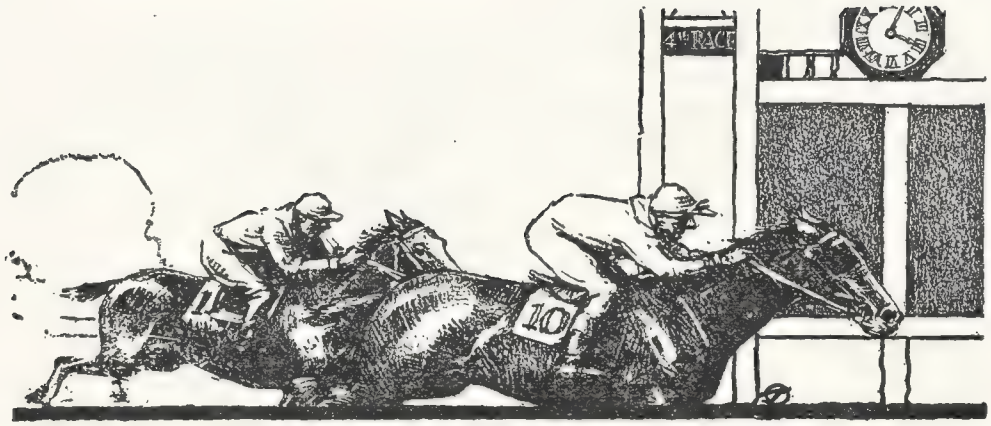
Lederby nodded.

"I put a supposititious case before Foster, asked him what he thought about it and—well, what do you think he did?"

"I don't know."

"He slapped me on the back—on the back, Melvin, where my horns were growing—and told me to go back to Loano and sober up. He said somebody was spoofing me! Spoofing me, Melvin!"

Lederby threw his head back and laughed; good laughter, too, in spite of the hint of pain in it; laughter that suggested a mind capable of lifting above even two "Koraba affairs" in a lifetime.



The SUN SHINES BRIGHT

By LUPTON A. WILKINSON

STROLLING idly over to the paddock immediately after the sixth race (there was no need for me to get in line at the pay-off windows; I had made—ahem—a slight error of judgment) I noticed Hard Luck Williams standing patiently by stall No. 12, waiting for his entry in the seventh to be led over from the stables.

Through the courtesy of a Washington newspaperman I had a press badge. Strictly speaking, that did not entitle the wearer to enter the actual paddock ring, that inner circle reserved to owners, trainers, grooms and jockeys, who form a close mouthed group around which the entries for a race parade for a few minutes' inspection by the cash customers outside the railed enclosure. However, I knew that the word press, with a little self-assurance, opens most circles; so I took a chance. The man who scrutinized the candidates for this nucleus of the elect, and who seemed to know most of them, glanced at my lapel and made no protest.

Hard Luck didn't see me at first. His gray streaked hair was a little mussed at the temples; his eyes seemed thoughtful under a puckered brow; his mouth was down at the corners in a dubious droop. He looked harassed and worried, as he always had in the fifteen years since I first saw him, and I had been told that that expression dated back another decade and a half.

Suddenly the slight and rather pathetic figure straightened. He mustered a smile. There was something wistful about Hard Luck's smile, as if he had to fetch it off a dusty shelf in the back of his mind; as if he had brought it out, at great effort, solely for you, but knew of no other reason on God's earth to smile except the necessities of politeness.

"Howdy, Mr. Hager," he greeted me. "Glad to see you down this year."

It was a sentiment annually expressed, and sincere. The sad brown eyes, the eyes of a trustful man puzzled by fate, an optimist who feels hurt but remains credulous in the face of oft recurring disappointment, lighted with what I knew to be genuine pleasure.

I do not go to the races often. In New York, where a desk bosses me, I make

it out to one of the metropolitan tracks on an occasional Saturday afternoon, and I am usually on hand for the Futurity and the Belmont. I saw Man o' War break John P. Grier's heart in the Dwyer.

But every Spring, without fail, I go for my vacation to a little hotel at Calverley, and lose myself delightedly in the last two weeks of the twenty-one day meeting at that Maryland track. The hotel breathes horse. Every conversation in the crowded dining room is of yesterday's bare misses at fortune and tomorrow's golden chance. There the thoroughbred is discussed, as he should be, in terms of personality, as one talks of fighters, or football players or tennis stars. "A bit too temperamental . . ." "The makings of a good one when he gets wiser . . . " "Has a heart bigger than his body . . ." So supremely equine is the atmosphere that I suspect sea horses swim in the bayou outside the Calverley Hotel.

There I had met Hard Luck Williams long ago, and had come to like the patient little man. I had even lent him money on two occasions, and as had been the experience of others perpetually surprised, I had got it back. How he kept going, with that nickname so lugubriously and incontestably earned, nobody knew; but he did. He was that strange anomaly: a man without money but with credit.

"Has this goat of yours any chance in the next, John?" I asked him, avoiding the jinxing nickname. "I could use a winner."

The worried look returned. My friend's face seemed more natural.

"I DON'T know, Mr. Hager," he said. "He won three in a row at Abingdon, against better horses than these. I claimed him in his last race there, paid twenty-two hundred dollars for him, and he has run in the ruck here for me twice. On what he showed me yesterday he ought to laugh at these plugs and I can't see any reason for him losing today, except—" he managed the ghost of a grin—"he belongs to me."

"Maybe he's staled off," I suggested.

"Staled off!" The tone conveyed negation and a queer, repressed enthusiasm. "Mr. Hager, if I gave you the figures on that horse's workouts, you would simply think I was lying. He burns up the track in the mornings. He has the stride and the willingness of a stake horse. If his conformation was a little better, he would be cut out for a champion. And no horse was ever in better condition."

It was a long speech for Hard Luck. I could see he was excited.

"What happened to him?" I inquired.

"I don't know," he answered, shaking his head. "I don't know."

The horses were coming in now. These were not dancing, hair trigger two-year-olds, but three-year-olds and up. They walked, for the most part, sedately under their colored blankets, each led by an exercise boy mounted on some strange looking misfit. The lead horses of a racing stable, and the deep friendships they inspire in the handsomer, finer racers, are one of the romantic commonplaces of the turf. Of all the sixteen horses that came into that paddock—the seventh race had a big field—only two entries were curveting, jerking their heads, angry eyed, difficult to control. Habitual bad actors—the curse of rival owners, the despair of their own masters and a menace to honest horseflesh. These could not have been led in at all except for the quieting influence of the lead ponies.

John's eyes lighted with interest. I followed his glance and my own expression must have showed a kindred flash. This was a nice horse, this lean, glossy black fellow, walking with an eager, business-like stride, muscles tensed but under perfect control, nerves alert but schooled by experience and held in restraint by that dignity of character—laugh if you want to—that distinguishes a good racehorse.

I could see what Hard Luck meant by faulty conformation. The horse was a little on the rangy side, the upper fore-

legs not quite sturdy enough for that pounding drive, with its unfailing piston-like pushing against the ground, that the champion must have in the bitter last yards of struggle against the best. But a nice horse. And a beautiful head. Intelligent, proud, set on a slim neck. The kind of black horse that a woman will go crazy about.

John was right about the condition, too. Nobody had ever claimed that his sparse fortune on the turf was due to inability to handle his charges. This one was fit and fine.

I glanced down at my program. Dusky Knight, by Gullah out of Knight's Belle. Excellent breeding, running back through approved crosses of the prized Commando strain. No wonder there was that more than hint of class.

The lead boy paused at stall No. 12 and a groom came out of the shadow to take charge of the racer. Hard Luck Williams walked over and laid a hand on the right side of Dusky Knight's neck. The horse did not move or display the slightest realization that any one was near, until the hand touched him. Then he shied slightly, though he quieted at once.

The racer's manner struck me as strange and Hard Luck must have seen puzzlement in my expression.

"Blind in this eye," he explained in answer to my look.

"You don't say so," I commented, and stepped forward for a closer look. The eye had none of the appearances of blindness, no grayness of the ball, no glassy stare.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Do you think I claimed the horse without being sure?" Hard Luck countered, exhibiting a mildly wounded expression.

"Perhaps having one good eye and one bad affects his running," I suggested hopefully:

John laughed shortly.

"Shucks!" he exclaimed. "I've run him with a blinker and without. It makes no difference."

THE saddling bell rang and the groom led Dusky Knight into the stall. Hard Luck followed him. I knew John would be absorbed in getting the girth just right, in seeing that the blanket had no crease or foreign irritant and in the other small details which no trainer will leave to any final inspection save his own. Besides, there was just comfortable time to place a bet, and I thought I would make a modest investment in Dusky Knight's chances.

The chalked figures on the blackboard, which are changed from time to time during the betting period, indicated that Dusky Knight would pay in the neighborhood of twelve to one, if he won. I completed my transaction with a mutuel cashier, and ascended the club house steps to plant myself at a point of vantage.

In my mind I turned over, for the twentieth time, the legend of the patient John. Thirty years ago he had given up a good job because something in his Kentucky blood drew him willy-nilly to the horses. He had married a nice girl, with a little money, and he had combined her nest egg with his savings and started a two-horse stable. I had heard Mrs. Williams speak of it, not bitterly but with discouragement. I noticed that she wasn't even at the track this year. She had long since lost faith.

Hard Luck Williams! Horses had died on him. His entries had suffered disqualifications that deprived him of sorely needed purses. He had lost more nose decisions than any other small owner in the game. Once he had got his hands on a seeming champion—Card Face. Somebody had poisoned Card Face just before his second start for John. The horse died and the case became famous in racing annals, but the hubbub did no good to John, who had refused twenty-five thousand dollars for Card Face the day before the poisoning.

There were a dozen other stories of the persistent misfortune that dogged this likable, uncomplaining man. I never thought of him without bringing to mind

the doleful strains of his native song, "The sun shines bright on my old Kentucky home—" It hadn't shone for John. And that sobbing chorus, "Weep no more, my lady—" I wondered if he sang it to Mrs. Williams. Hard Luck. He had earned the name!

A bugle blew. The crowd stirred in expectancy and the sixteen thoroughbreds came out on the track, in single file, preceded by a mounted man in a red coat. Most of this lot were ordinary looking. I glanced at the program again. A two thousand dollar claiming race. That meant that anybody at the track could take John's horse, or get equal chance at him in a draw with other would-be purchasers, by depositing two thousand dollars with the racing secretary before the race. I knew John liked Dusky Knight and he must need badly to win a purse, or he would not have risked his racer so cheaply.

The distance was a mile and an eighth, and the horses started out of an angled chute, at the upper end of the stands. This made them have to pass the judges once before they swung around the first curve. The newfangled "stall start" was used, the horses being separated from each other by box-like barriers about two feet high. Because of the angle, the inside horses, farthest from the main track, were at a disadvantage. Early speed on the outside could cut them off going to the turn and they might get shuffled or bumped out of contention.

At Calverley the afternoon sun is behind the stands, so that it flashed resplendently on the bright costumes of the jockeys. Red and white blocks, red and black stripes, green and yellow halves, green and purple quarterings, cerise with yellow dots, a galaxy of shifting brilliance as the horses backed, twisted, came up again, each jockey laboring to have his mount just at the right position for a quick getaway. I shall never grow too old, I hope, to feel a stirring of the pulse, a catch at the throat, in the suspense of those fateful moments before the yellow flag is dropped. *Crack!* They were off.

DUSKY KNIGHT broke from No. 12 position, with only four horses outside him. He fell effortlessly into a smooth stride. Several of the inside horses were being punished severely to hustle them to that first turn free of interference. As they passed the judges the first time Dusky Knight was running fifth, but only half a length off the leader. He looked good.

Then two of the outside horses—nearest to the watchers in the stands—came up into contention. Now, I thought, the boy had better drive him through, take the lead and avoid pinching at the turn.

But something had happened to Dusky Knight. He faltered, ran with interrupted rhythm. As they passed that first turn he dropped back to ninth. He held that around the next turn and all the way down the backstretch he made up ground steadily. When the field came again into the homestretch he was a fast challening third. He himself was challenged, on both sides, thirty yards from the judges, and he chucked it, finishing a receding seventh.

I made a wry face, more for John than myself, and started for the hotel.

Hard Luck shrugged when I saw him in the hotel dining room.

"It's got me puzzled," he said. "In the mornings he will go a mile and a quarter without a sign of quitting."

Tuesday and Wednesday treated me kindly. On Thursday I noticed Dusky Knight entered again, this time at a mile and a sixteenth, in a field of five horses. The affair was a fifteen hundred dollar claimer.

The crowd, remembering Abingdon form, and appraising the crowbait competition, supported the black horse somewhat, in spite of his three bad races at Calverley, and he closed at three to one. I took another chance myself because I figured he had only been beaten in the final sixteenth of a mile on Monday. Today he took the lead early and held it all the way, winning by five lengths under double wraps.

I went out to congratulate John. As

he stepped forward to take the steaming racer from the groom, a negro boy ran up.

"They done claim yo' hoss, Mistuh Williams," he cried.

John stumbled, whether in excitement at the news or over some obstruction on the ground, I could not tell. He brought up against Dusky Knight's neck and it was a full minute before that one, still full of life after his winning race, could be quieted.

Hard Luck recovered his balance and, as he turned toward me, the bright sun, shining full on his face, illuminated a picture of complete discouragement.

Some one came and took the horse away.

We walked over to a couple of upturned buckets outside the paddock enclosure and John sat down. His shoulders drooped.

"The winners's share of this purse is seven hundred dollars," he remarked, in that tone of perpetual resignation, "and I lose the horse for seven hundred dollars less than I paid for him, after three entry fees, three jockey fees, two losing bets and three weeks of feed bills. Just when he decides to win some more, too." He sighed.

"Did you have a bet on him today?" I asked.

He hesitated for a long moment before he said softly—

"Fifty dollars."

We were silent a minute. Then John straightened up. Looking down at him, I was startled. He was trembling like a leaf. His face had the aspect of a man suddenly stricken. Was he having some sort of seizure?

"Lord! Lord!" he exclaimed. He was talking to himself, had forgot my existence. "And I lose the horse for fifteen hundred dollars!"

The brown eyes rolled in veritable anguish.

"John," I inquired in concern. "What's the matter with you?"

"Mr. Hager," he demanded, getting up and laying a hand on my arm, "will you lend me five hundred dollars?"

THE request seemed to me a trifle sudden. The amount was more than I could afford to let anybody have lightly. John's queer manner, too, was not conducive to confidence. I hesitated.

"Please," he urged. "It's the chance of my life."

"What do you want it for?" I asked, slowly.

"I want to put it with what I'll have left after settling my bills, and some other I can borrow, and claim Dusky Knight back," he informed me.

This increased my dubiety.

"You'll have to jam him in a cheap race and win a quick purse, after you get him," I reminded him, "and he certainly acts like an in-and-outer. Suppose he doesn't win at the first asking. Suppose you lose the race, and the horse, too, perhaps again for less than you paid for him. It looks foolish, John."

It had come to me that one reason for Mrs. Williams' absence from Calverley was the item of hotel bill.

"He won't lose, Mr. Hager," Hard Luck pleaded. "He's not an in-and-outer. He's as honest as any horse that ever breathed. I've always felt it in my bones. Now I know it. I know all about that horse, Mr. Hager. And if he's claimed off me, win or lose, I'll at least get enough to pay you back the five hundred."

"I'll need it," I put in dryly. "What's this big secret?"

"Don't ask me," Hard Luck begged. "Just trust me."

He pressed his lips down in a determined way, and I knew he was suffering an acute attack of every horseman's malady in the face of a possible coup—secretiveness.

"Well," I capitulated, "you're my weakness. I don't know which of us is the crazier."

I sincerely hoped that this horse, if John got him back, wouldn't die on him.

Dusky Knight's new owner didn't wait long to attempt a profit on his investment. He started him Monday. Running un-

evenly, the black horse finished eighth in a field of fourteen.

After the race I hurried over to the paddock, filled with foreboding. Sure enough, there was John, fondling the sleek, inky neck and looking like Mr. Riddle admiring Man o' War. He had got back this lemon, he told me, although he didn't call it a lemon, for two thousand dollars.

"Heaven help us both," I breathed fervently. "When are you going to start him?"

"I'll tell you tomorrow," he promised.

Tuesday night he beckoned to me from the lobby as I was finishing my dessert. Then he conducted me mysteriously upstairs to the tiny room he occupied.

"Well," he confided, after shutting the door carefully, "I've entered him."

"When?" I inquired, failing to see the reason for the atmosphere of mystification and importance.

"In the Lord Carteret Handicap, Saturday," he said.

I jumped as if somebody had jammed me with a pin—a five hundred dollar pin.

"You what?" I shouted.

"Sh!" Hard Luck warned, with an air of juvenile conspiracy. "He gets in with a hundred and two pounds."

I was speechless. What difference would light weight make to this plater in that race? He ought to get in with fifty pounds, if they could find a boy that light to ride him.

This was stark lunacy. The Lord Carteret Handicap, as everybody in racing knows, is the big last day climax of the Calverley meeting. With a purse of thirty thousand dollars, it is one of the biggest prizes on the American turf for older horses. Most of the entries are worth at least thirty thousand dollars apiece. All the real horses that are in early Spring condition try for this juicy plum.

"Where did you get the thousand dollar entry fee?" I demanded, in a voice that sounded weak and unreal.

"I borrowed it from Jack Blaine," Hard Luck informed me calmly.

"You what?" I shouted again.

"I asked him and he laughed and said the loan might give him good luck," the amazing little man explained.

John Richardson Blaine, multimillionaire patent medicine king, was the owner of Sun Flow, favorite for the Lord Carteret. The noble, stocky chestnut had won nearly two hundred thousand dollars the year before. Despite a forbidding package of weight which the handicapper had decreed he should carry, the crowd would bet the chestnut Saturday as if the race was already over.

"John," I said solemnly, "I know now that you're really crazy."

We parted that night less in the spirit of mutual liking than at any time in our fifteen years' acquaintance. John Richardson Blaine's thousand dollars might be, to that plutocrat, only a luck token. My five hundred was money. It hurt.

I DID not see much of Hard Luck that week. He did not press himself on me in the hotel lobby or diningroom and I was absorbed in form charts. I seemingly had lost the ability to pick 'em. They ran way back if I bet 'em and galloped home if I switched. The story of Blaine's loan to the old-timer filtered around, as everything does at a racetrack, and occasioned much merriment among the regulars. I couldn't produce a laugh.

Saturday found me looking back on a deplorably expensive vacation, but I landed two winners out of the first three races, one of them at a nice price.

The fool returns to the scene of his folly and of course I trekked to the paddock before the fourth race, which was the Lord Carteret Handicap. All of the fifteen starters except Dusky Knight were already walking the magic oval or champing in their stalls, where attention was being lavished on them that a favorite of Louis XIV might have cherished from her handmaidens.

As I went out I glanced at the approximate odds. The first line gave Sun Flow at 3 to 5. Lady Starbeam, a three-year-

old filly who had won a stack of dough as a juvenile was the next choice at 2½ to 1. Flying High, a veteran of many good campaigns, was held at 3's, as was Lichtenstein, an imported horse that had shown tiptop form in two smaller stakes. The rest ranged through 6's, 8's, 10's, 12's, 15's and a 40 to the horse I had lent Hard Luck five hundred dollars to help claim. The price on him was 100 to 1 and I groaned in self-derision.

At the paddock I forgot my woes in admiration of the favorite. He was walking with head arched, eyes flashing this way and that, a picture of beautiful horseflesh in perfect condition. His chestnut coat was glossy, his mane tightly curled. I could understand Blaine's pride in him, as he was the result of four equine generations of breeding, with many lean years between the champions.

I looked in vain for the black lemon. Hard Luck stood by stall No. 6, but he looked through me as if he had never seen me. I knew that for some reason he wanted, for the present, to avoid conversation. Time pressed. I was wondering whether I dared take the odds-on price on Sun Flow, who had to carry the prodigious package of 132 pounds, and whether I would have opportunity, if I waited much longer, to make a wager at all. I threw Lady Starbeam out of consideration. She was weighted at 118, a lot of pounds for a young filly against fine horses. Flying High, with 123 up, might run one of his brilliant races, but I had an idea the old fellow would need to race himself into condition before tackling such good ones under a steadying impost. Lichtenstein, the foreign contender, was in nicely with 115. I sighed. This was no easy spot.

Just then the saddling bell rang and, at this last possible minute, a black boy hustled in with the even sabler Dusky Knight. I noticed at once that the blanket was pulled way up over the horse's head. The groom led him directly into the stall and, instead of taking the blanket off, John merely pushed it up on his neck while he himself saddled him.

The blanket came off and John stepped out with it over one arm. I was staring into the stall with astonishment.

"But, John," I protested. "You—"

"Bet this hundred for me, all to win," he cut me off. He shoved a roll of bills into my hand and ducked out of the paddock.

For a moment I stood stupefied. Where on earth had he managed to rake up these dirty ones and fives? And why in the name of heaven was he mad enough to put it all on the nose? Even if he thought his plater had a chance in this race, he should have ordered most of the wager to be laid for second or third place. Dusky Knight would pay plenty, if he got his slim head anywhere in the money.

To my stunned mind leaped the realization that I would have to sprint to be quick enough to execute John's suicidal instructions. I ran.

There were eight other late comers ahead of me at the fifty dollar window. I heard the bugle blow and stood in a perspiration of nervousness during what seemed an interminably slow advance of the line. I knew the field would be parading back and forth in front of the stands, and I knew the window before me would close irrevocably as soon as the horses reached the starting position. I arrived, though, in ample time before a deftly blasé gentleman who took in big bills and handed out little pieces of pasteboard.

THERE is no understanding the human animal and least of all the follower of racing. I despised John for entering Dusky Knight in this race. I was disgusted with myself for being a party to the ridiculous venture. Every atom of horse sense I possessed told me this was the most forlorn, the most insane sally at fortune in the annals of tracks. But in my hands was another man's last hundred dollars that he was tossing into the most uncertain of all gambling enterprises, where it looked as if all cards were stacked

against him, all dice loaded; somewhere he had found faith, and a race is never settled until it is run. I blush to remember it, but I added fifty dollars of my own.

I sprinted some more, reached the top of the ramp, in the clubhouse, well out of breath and a-tingle with excitement. This was folly, but the thrill of the long chance was in my blood.

"Look at Hard Luck Williams' goat," I heard some one comment. "Blind in one eye and a blinker on the other."

They were at the barrier now and the assistant starters were pulling and hauling at the refractory ones. Once more the flash of sun on bright colors. Once more the ceaseless maneuvering of jockeys. Hearts beat high before a race like this. Great horses grow greater or suffer reverses that have to be lived down. Men win enough to carry them a year, or millionaires achieve a guerdon for the pride which has caused them to spend thousands in trying, again and again, for such stakes and the fleeting fame that goes with winning. And the forty thousand restless people around me, all of them had a minor part in this drama, big or little, conservative or wildly speculative, according to the pocketbook and temperament of the better.

They were off!

In a majesty of speed and power Sun Flow shot out of No. 3 position and went to the front. He was always willing to do his best at any stage of a race, whenever called on, and now he charged down the rail, well within himself, to take a two lengths' lead and roll to the first turn handsomely clear of all interference.

The black horse that carried my fifty dollars and three decades of John Williams' unquenchable optimism did not get off well. Most of the pack swept by him, and Jimmie Cleaver, the clever kid that John had obtained to ride him—I wondered where he raised the necessary three hundred—took the black to the inside where he had the luck to find a place against the rail. At the turn he was in sixth place, but he had escaped pinching or bumping.

Around the second turn the procession carved its bright arc. Sun Flow was still in front, but Skinner, one of the best of jockeys, was rating him carefully. Two of the long shots, under the whip, challenged, and Skinner let them go by, continuing his restraining hand with the judgment and patience that had made the boy famous.

Dusky Knight was running smoothly. Today there had been no fault in his stride, no interruption of rhythm. He looked as if he was going to run his race, but I experienced no elation. That field was full of fine horseflesh.

At the end of the backstretch the two sprinters began to come back to the following thunder. Those two were nearly done, burned out. Simultaneously Lichtenstein, Flying High and Dusky Knight put on pressure. All three passed Sun Flow and the fading leaders. The big chestnut continued his even pace, moving like a relentless machine. Skinner had never relaxed that tight hold.

At the head of the stretch I grew excited. Dusky Knight was running third, and only half a length behind Flying High, who was leading. But, inevitably and as if it were all a matter of choice, Skinner turned his champion loose. The three front horses swung a trifle wide at that last turn and Sun Flow, like a blond express train, rolled through on the rail. Almost in a moment he was two lengths in front. Here came power.

On that same turn Jimmie Cleaver shook up John's horse and drove between Flying High and Lichtenstein. Our horse was second. Simultaneously, out of the tail of my eye, I caught a bay streak that had emerged from the back like a bullet and was now swinging to the outside. Lady Starbeam was moving up to display one of her great finishes.

Jimmy Cleaver rode like a fiend, hand and heel, and Dusky Knight, responding gamely, closed that intervening daylight inch by inch. Halfway down the stretch he had won to the chestnut's rump. Another twenty yards and the black nose was at Skinner's stirrup.

There the advance stopped. Meanwhile Lady Starbeam, running straight and true on the outside, had passed the others and was lapped on the straining Dusky Knight.

That way, it seemed, they would cross the finish, unless Lady Starbeam nipped us out of second place. I was remembering the $4,000, the second horse's share of the purse, that John might win, hoping to heaven he would get it and wishing the fool—and I—had made our bet in the second hole.

TEN yards from the finish one of those things happened which even champions must endure. Sun Flow was giving thirty pounds to a fit horse of his own age, fourteen to one of the best fillies on four feet. It was only the chestnut's second start of the season. That stretch run had been a grueling test. Suddenly, almost imperceptibly, the leader hung.

I still did not think we could get up, despite Jimmie Cleaver's frantic urging. Up we came, though, inch by inch. At the throat latch. Even. Skinner hit Sun Flow once with the whip. The gallant heart answered and the blond horse forged ahead, but only two hand breadths. Jimmie Cleaver seemed to pick Dusky Knight up between his knees and hurl him at the finish line. As they went over, the long nose of Lady Starbeam, still closing, blotted the other two from my vision.

I had no idea who had won. I sank back off my toes exhausted, became conscious of the pandemonium around me, realized from a dry hoarseness that I had been yelling for the past long minute.

There was one second of that breathless stillness.

Then the numbers went up. No. 6. Dusky Knight!

A few good sports managed a scattering of handclaps, but, for the most part, the great crowd was stunned. Thousands had gone on that gallant chestnut, now being ridden wearily back from around the clubhouse turn.

Over in the negro bleachers, though, I heard a high pitched, feminine scream.

"'Fo' Gawd!" wailed the eery pæan. "Dat black beauty! Gawd, 'e run!"

Well, there were three of us, anyway.

The prices were displayed. $122.28. That meant that for every two dollars bet on Dusky Knight the ticket holders would collect that amount, which included return of the bet. Sixty to one. John had won six thousand dollars. I had won three thousand. And, of course, John would get the lion's share of $30,000—incredible riches for that lean, shabby man—and the privilege of keeping for one year the Lord Carteret Cup.

There was some kind of hubbub at the judges' stand. For an awful instant I feared a disqualification, though the running of the race had seemed true enough. But no, they were waiting for John. The owner, or the trainer, of a winner of the Lord Carteret is supposed to lead his horse before the judges and the photographers and receive the emblem from the hands of some distinguished guest chosen by the president of the Calverley Association for the Improvement of the Breed of Horses.

John was both owner and trainer of Dusky Knight. This day the donor was to be the Vice-President of the United States. He stood, a kindly and well loved figure, looking a little foolish as he clutched the big vase. The jockey had led the winner to the stand and stood there, reins in hand, at a loss.

Suddenly John Richardson Blaine, a giant of a man, swung over the rail. He took charge of Dusky Knight and, a moment later, received the cup from the Vice-President. The crowd, all of whom had read in the papers of the sportsman's loan to Hard Luck, cheered.

As I went to get in line at the pay-off window—that line was short—I was puzzled and a little worried. What had become of John Williams? Had he dropped dead? Men had done so with less provocation.

It was still hard to believe in my friend's fortune. His horse had beat Sun Flow, for real money. True he had had

to have thirty pounds weight advantage, good racing luck and a slight faltering on the champion's part to do it. But, in racing as in all of life, the pay-off is on the result, not the conditions. And Dusky Knight, though he might never shine so brightly again, was a despised plater no longer. John, for the second time in his life, owned a horse.

I REACHED the cashier's window, counted out a small mountain of money, crammed it in various pockets and made tracks for the paddock. There I saw, with relief, John Williams, sponging off Dusky Knight as gently and as skilfully as a mother bathes a baby. The steaming horse seemed to experience a conscious pride.

John looked happy, but quite calm. He had always believed implicitly that his turn would come. The expected had happened. That was all.

Big John Blaine walked up, the Lord Carteret Cup, yellow and massive, under his arm. He set it down on the ground. The two Johns shook hands.

"Williams," said Blaine, "there's no man in the world whose horse I could see beat Sun Flow with better grace."

"Thank you," said John. Then, to me, "Give Mr. Blaine back his thousand dollars."

Blaine laughed.

"Give it to charity," he said. "It's been too expensive to me already. I'd be afraid to touch it."

When Dusky Knight was safely and comfortably in his stall, munching the oats of greatness, Hard Luck and I walked back to the hotel.

"Now, John," I demanded, "spill it."

"You saw, of course," John told me, "that the blinker was on the blind eye."

"I did," I replied. "But nobody else in the stand seemed to realize it."

"I didn't want 'em to," said John. "You see, Mr. Hager, I just learned, Thursday of last week, that Dusky Knight isn't totally blind in that eye. In the shade, he can't see. But, if the sun strikes it, he receives confused impressions, has a partial, distorted sight. He won three in a row at Abingdon, where the sun is on the far side of the track. He could work clear of competition before the other horses passed between him and the sun. He won here, in a small field, for the same reason. But, in a big field, and with the sun on his right side, the bobbing heads of competing horses were monstrous shadows to him, something terrible about to collide and crash. He wanted to back away, to get out of danger. It ruined his starts and it ruined his finishes."

"How did you find out?"

"Well, that first day you saw me touch his neck in the shadows of the paddock, and he didn't know it till my hand made contact with his flesh. But, last Saturday, when he had just come out of a race and was standing outside the paddock, facing the same way as the track, I stumbled against him, with the bright sun behind me, and he started to shy *before* I touched him. I had tried a blinker on the good eye. I suddenly knew that if I put it on his bad eye he would run like the good, honest horse he is."

"John," I said, "I owe you an apology."

"No you don't," he said soberly. "This business today was a wild chance to take."

"Where did you go after the race?" I inquired. "Why weren't you on hand to receive the cup?"

"As soon as the numbers went up," he answered, "I ran for the hotel and telephoned Mrs. Williams in New York."

"What did you say to her?" I could not help asking.

"I told you so," he replied.

After thirty years!

SPIRIT MEAT

By

VICTOR SHAW

TO HIS fellow Nugumiut Innuits, Sunah is a hero. Once a mighty Northern hunter, he is now an ancient withered little man with snowy straggling hair, too feeble for *kyack* paddle or the chase. He is also badly lamed. Long ago the muscles of one leg and arm were torn away in a terrific knife battle with a white she-bear, a fight in which he lost an eye, as well. The other sparkles with the accumulated wisdom for which he is now revered.

On sunny days, he sits in the doorway of his seal hide *tupic* like an oracle, hunched in his sealskin *netcha*, claw-like hands thrust into its sleeves, skinny spine bared between its hem and the drawstring of his bearskin breeches. He has no need to hunt. The best meat is offered him, as to a god. It was not always thus.

Others so old are put away, according to Innuit custom, on the death island; but not Sunah. So long as one Innuit is left and another to listen, just so long will his story be told in the *igloos* during the long night when evil spirits ride the winter gales: the wonder tale of the daring hunter who braved the place of the dead to get meat for his starving people.

Famine gripped the land. It was late summer, with winter looming, the season when Innuits are always forced to hunt hard to keep the belly filled. Even tundra berries had been killed that spring by a late freeze. Long ago, all dogs had been sacrificed.

One by one the weakest succumbed. Little ones died in the hoods of mothers whose flattened breasts were dry. At last an evil spirit entered one desperate hunter. He was caught and his knife taken away, just as he crept upon an old woman who lay dying in her *tupic*.

When that happened, the wise men had a long talk. It was decided that every able man should set out upon a last big hunt. It that failed, the people must make for the distant interior where the caribou might be found. A gloomy outlook, for none but the strongest had a chance to survive the terrible overland journey. The old, the weak and helpless must remain. For them, the island death.

Alone, upon some barren sea rock, those no longer useful to the community are left to face the Unknown. A necessary custom in a land of grim reality. Innuits bow to it with resignation.

Not so, Kiowa, son of Sunah, whose father was even then too old and crippled to outlast the terrible march inland. Kiowa pleaded with the wise men that they let him help his father. If Sunah, he argued, could not keep up, then Kiowa would carry Sunah upon his back as women carry game the hunters have killed.

But none would listen. When Kiowa urged their need of Sunah's experience and wisdom, the rest turned away, or shook their heads. Sunah, they pointed out, hunted now only by sitting beside the breathing holes of the seals, or riding upon a sledge into the hills where caribou pawed the snow from beds of moss.

So it was: if the hunt failed, as doubtless it would, Sunah must be put away with the other helpless ones, because too many spoke against him. But, when Kiowa started with the rest upon that

final desperate quest, he stole back again intending to hide away his father. But Sunah shook his head with a smile.

"Take your harpoon, my son," he commanded, "and your seal spear. Point your *kyack* for the open sea, beyond the outer islands. There has been wind from the ice plains in the north, and perhaps it has driven down the floating ice where the seals sleep. If so, there might even be a walrus, or a bear. But first, give me of your powder and bullets; then take me in your *kyack*, across the bay where the Big Ice lies beyond the hills."

Kiowa knew that because there was no powder and lead to waste upon those who could not travel fast and far, Sunah had been refused a share. Yet, Sunah was the wisest and most skilled hunter of them all. Therefore, because his own arm was still stout to hurl harpoon and spear, Kiowa eagerly turned over to his father his old trade musket and ammunition.

But Kiowa's heart was heavy. He suspected Sunah's real purpose. No Innuit willingly sets foot upon the mysterious ice cap covering part of that Arctic land. It is known to be the threshold to Hades, haunted by restless souls of the damned; and although saddened, Kiowa respected Sunah's courage, because he went to die alone in that place of the dead, rather than have the shame of the island death.

Across the bay, Kiowa watched his father limp from sight; a weak old man, lame and half blind, but with the strong heart of youth. Sunah was gone, and nothing could be done about it. With tears streaming down his brown cheeks, Kiowa drove his *kyack* fiercely past the outlying islands to the open sea, eager to prove his father's sagacity.

Sunah, he discovered at once, had known the truth, but only in part. The floating ice, he found, but no seal, although he hunted feverishly. Baffled, he was at last forced by the rising wind to return, exhausted, weak from gnawing hunger, defeated.

He found the village in a turmoil. Most of the hunters had returned and were jammed in an excited mob before Sunah's *tupic*. As Kiowa stumbled, wondering, toward them, other hunters straggled in emptyhanded like the rest and joined the group that stood agape.

There was cause to stare. Sunah sat there, his one eye closed in ecstasy—Sunah, the despised, his face and hands reddened with rich blood. Clutched in one hand he held a dripping liver, from which he slashed a luscious strip now and then and crammed it into his mouth. That it was a musk ox liver, all saw plainly. Several gasped at once:

"Whence came this meat? Is there more? Who killed it?"

"*Awunga*," Sunah boasted, through a full mouth. "I killed it, and many more. Alone, I have succeeded where the best of you failed, and there is plenty for all."

The circle gaped.

"How can this thing be?" they marveled. "Sunah is lame. He is old and nearly blind. He has no powder and lead." Shaking incredulous heads, they demanded truth. "Sunah, where did you get the meat?"

"I was led to it, Innu; a herd of *omingmuk* on the Big Ice," he told them, and as he filled his mouth he winked at Kiowa.

"The place of the dead!" they gasped. "This is magic. Alone, he could not do it. He was helped by spirits and this is spirit meat." But then, because the fresh blood reeked in their hungry nostrils, they added, "Where is the rest of it?"

Sunah ceased eating long enough to wave a hand bayward.

"The meat comes, Innuits," he chuckled.

They looked, and it was so. An *oomeeak* loaded full had reached shore, from a trip across the bay; and up the beach came a file of panting, laughing *koonahs*, each woman bent double under the weight of Sunah's musk oxen.

At last, filled to bursting although still eating, Kiowa came to Sunah's *tupic*.

"Sunah," he whispered, "this meat tastes real. Tell me, were you really helped by spirits—or not?"

Sunah, almost asleep, opened his eye.

"My son—" he grinned— "do spirits leave tracks?"

SCOURGE *of the* VOLGA

By NATALIE B. SOKOLOFF

RUSSIA, as a whole, had forgotten all about him long ago, but along the great river Volga even now one will hear suddenly his resonant name ring out loudly and boisterously in the old songs conceived and sung by the common people.

For it was chiefly on the Volga, on the river itself and along both banks, sometimes as far as a hundred miles inland, that the famous robber Stepan Charmak plied his dangerous trade in the middle of the 18th Century.

Success to him did not come all at once; no legend tells us that he woke up one day to find himself become a celebrity overnight. At the time there were many other robbers, numerous other bands, and he and his men worked diligently for the length of some twenty years before at last the name Stepan Charmak became a household word throughout the country.

He was then about forty years old. He had grown into a national menace. Regiment after regiment was called out from Nijni Novgorod, from Astrakhan, from Moscow; fabulous sums were promised for his reckless head; the governors vied with each other in ways and means of setting traps for that devil, Stepan Charmak.

However, it all proved of no avail. As before, merchants were found on lonely roads with their throats slashed; the night skies over villages and small towns grew red and purple repeatedly with the reflection of the fires the robber left in his wake as he moved hither and thither over the land, appearing and disappearing with the swiftness and brilliance of lightning.

He liked to surprise the long caravans of barges filled with the choicest of goods and moving slowly and stealthily down the river Volga; to confront unexpectedly some rich county magnate traveling with pomp and extensive retinue along the great highway; to pay a short visit to some estate of a country nobleman and leave the master with half a dozen servants dangling from the oak beams of the dining room ceiling over the remains of the uninvited guest's sumptuous meal . . .

"YES, it's an early Spring we are having this year, Anton Antonovitch," the old nobleman Boolat-Zadonski said pleasantly to his friend and neighbor Vorodin as they sat together pulling at their long pipes one evening. "The ice on the dear heart Volga is all gone. Good crops this year perhaps, Anton Antonovitch."

He was dressed in the rich, bright clothes of the day. A high necked shirt of yellow silk and over it the long coat of green cloth, the so called *toolup*, a voluminous garment, gathered in wide folds at the waist, heavily lined with cotton and sheepskin. His trousers, full about the knees, were of blue cloth and were thrust into boots of bright red leather. He was a tall, white haired, white bearded man, a typical rich nobleman of the time, somewhat red in the long, strong face from continual overeating and overdrinking. Though haughty and fierce at the first glance, he proved invariably the best of companions, being a merry, jolly old fellow at heart.

His guest, the petty country squire Vorodin, was quite a different man. Very small, withered-like, with a thin gray beard and thin gray hair, inconspicuously attired in something dark resembling a clerk's or an artisan's dress, he spoke to his host deferentially in a thin, timid voice, bowed his head respectfully whenever spoken to, and listened with an enthusiastic smile to the old nobleman's good humored talk.

He said now, with a short, deferential laugh:

"All is in God's hands, Gerasim Ivanovitch. Good crops, we will give thanks. Bad crops, we will give thanks. All is in God's hands."

"Yes, it's all the same to you, Anton Antonovitch," replied the old nobleman, caressing his magnificent beard. "You are getting very rich, good crops or bad crops. Now you are for buying another village. I don't know how you do it."

"Eh, Gerasim Ivanovitch! Who says I am rich? My house, for instance. Why, it's just a peasant's hut! Though it boasts two stories, it's just a hut."

"Yes, and every window iron barred like a regular fortress. What's that for? Ah! I'd be afraid to live in that hut of yours, Anton Antonovitch. There's no way to get out of it but through the doors. What if a fire, now—"

"Just to feel safe, Gerasim Ivanovitch. That's all. But even with iron bars, it's just a hut. A peasant's hut."

"You are just being polite, Anton Antonovitch. But just the same, hut or no hut, you're getting richer every year. Soon you'll be richer than I am. Now, Anton Antonovitch, really, don't be offended, but it just beats me. What the world's coming to I can't imagine! Now you were my father's serf, were you not? And look you! Here you are, a freeman these twenty years, buying another village and sitting here, my guest and equal. And what's more, your son an officer and a nobleman in his own right." He waved his large veined hand pleasantly at the tall young man in the brilliant scarlet and gold uniform of the Eagle Hussars.

The handsome young officer was bend-

ing over the dark curly head of a young girl who was sitting at the tall embroidery frame, her hands busy with the needle and her laughing eyes downcast.

It was early twilight. Candles had not yet been brought in. In the great white stove large logs cracked gaily, while their yellow and red flames illuminated the whole room, making the scarlet and gold uniform of the young Hussar shine like the fire itself, deepening the blue shadows in the corners of the spacious dark chamber, and bringing into sharp relief the old nobleman's strong reddish face, the dark stooping shoulders of his guest and the tiny yellow toe of the young girl's shoe as it peeped from under the flounced, belaced skirts of her white dress.

Along one wall on the long bench sat some seven serf girls in white blouses with wide embroidered sleeves, their necks and heads covered with numerous trinkets and ornaments which sparkled in the firelight. They were making lace.

By the window, the mistress of the house, a large stout lady in dark kashmir shawls and a broad cap of white linen, was knitting socks. Now and then, from sheer habit, she would glance out of the window, though she was no less anxious than the others to finish her work before nightfall when the whole household would retire, not for the night, but only for a few hours' sleep, for it was Easter eve. On the first toll of the church bell down in the village they would all start across the gardens and down the road to attend the Easter midnight mass. It was the service no Russian would miss.

"Well, if we haven't a caller now," said the mistress of the house suddenly, getting up and peering into the gathering dusk. "Who can it be?"

Her husband and Vorodin ran to join her at the window.

Up the broad avenue of bare trees a horseman was approaching at a brisk trot. He passed the windows and they caught a glimpse of him; middle aged, heavily built, bearded.

"A stranger," said the old nobleman, returning to his chair.

"Yes; some traveler. Here, Nastiay! Koozma!" His wife clapped her hands. "Bring vodka here—pickles, bread," she called to the servants who appeared at the doors. "Oats for the stranger's horse. And see that there is enough hot water in the bath house. He will want a bath, I know. And get the bed ready. Perhaps he will stay the night. Quick, now! Lively!"

It was the custom in those days to offer lavish hospitality to any one who chanced to call at or pass one's house. Whatever the stranger's profession, trade, title or calling—all were received warmly, like old friends.

The old lady sat down again and took up her knitting. The door opened and the stranger entered.

HE PROVED a bit taller than he had appeared from the window, yet he could not be said to be more than of middle height. Stolid he looked, broad in the shoulders, had a pleasant face, dark, with black eyes, black eyebrows, red hair and a thick, short red beard. He held his round fur hat in both his hands as on entering he first of all, in accordance with the custom of the time, looked toward that corner which was dark and gleaming with innumerable old ikons in their silver bejeweled frames, bowed slowly and very low three times in their direction, then very slowly, his black eyes on the ikons, crossed his great chest also three times. Only then he allowed himself to glance over the room seeking out the mistress of the house to whom belonged by right the first bow. So to her he bowed very low and very slowly. Then to the master. Then one low bow in which he included every one else.

His unhurried, dignified manner; the assured way in which he crossed himself; his long, knee length *toolup* of dark blue cloth; the red silk sash tied about his broad waist; the knee high boots of brown woolen stuff; everything about him in fact showed at once his calling

and profession. He was a merchant, evidently a well to do merchant.

"Welcome—welcome, merchant," cried the old nobleman, waving his hand pleasantly. "Drink, please." He motioned toward the decanters of vodka and plates of pickles and bread, which the servant held to the merchant on a silver tray. "Supper? Bath? Hope you will spend the night with us. Perhaps stay a week or two. Holidays—Easter!"

The merchant took up a small tumbler, lifted it to his mouth, threw back his head and thus emptied it in one quick gulp. He then bowed again, very low, produced a kerchief and slowly wiped his red mustache and his short red beard.

"Thank you, your Honor. Thank you, mistress," he said in his deep, low voice, the kind of voice one naturally expects from an honest, well to do merchant. "No bath, thank you, your Honor. No supper, thank you. No bed, thank you. Just a short rest. The horse is tired. And then I must hurry on."

"Sit you down, sit you down, merchant!" cried the old nobleman. "Well, and from what parts do you come, if I may ask?" He went on pleasantly as the stranger lowered himself carefully on to a stool and sat there, stolid, dignified, his hat in both his hands.

"From Nijni Novgorod, your Honor."

"Oho! Some distance! And going where, if I may ask?"

"To Moscow."

"Well, well. Tell us how is it? The roads? All right? Safe? No sign of that devil Stepan Charmak?"

"Seems everything's as it should be, your Honor. The roads safe, yes. So far as I'm concerned, at least. Or I wouldn't have been here." The merchant smiled while the others laughed aloud. "But there are rumors that Charmak is somewhere near Nijni Novgorod. I heard them say he was working there just now."

"No, you don't say," cried the host. "And we are expecting him here every day. A month ago he burned the Zanay village—that's thirty miles from here. Some say he is still lurking somewhere about these parts. This officer's detachment, it is stationed in a small place ten miles distant or so—from here, I mean—well, it has orders to look out for Charmak."

"I hope you catch him," said the merchant, looking the handsome Hussar over slowly.

"Ah, it's terrible, terrible," said the old lady. "The saints preserve us! Think, merchant, any day this Charmak may pay us a visit. Really, Gerasim Ivanovitch—" she turned to her husband—"when we go to mass tonight, do leave a few men to guard the house."

"What! Keep the men from attending the Easter midnight mass? I couldn't do that, madam. Moreover, what's a few men? Charmak will cut their throats, that's all."

"And no need to worry, mistress," put in the merchant hastily. "I may just as well tell you. Charmak can't be in any of these parts here. It's not rumors, he's in Nijni Novgorod, he is."

"The saints preserve the unfortunates! Is he, now? How do you know, merchant?"

"I saw him, mistress."

"You saw him?" cried every one in the room with one voice.

And the stranger was rendered speechless for awhile by the sudden volley of questions which fell on him from all sides.

"Tell us," they all asked. "How does he look? Is it true he looks like the devil himself? Is he tall? Merchant, is he old?"

"Come, tell us," cried the old nobleman, smiling good humoredly at the general excitement.

"Well," said the merchant, "he is not what you'd call tall. About my height, more like. Looks my age, too. Well, there's nothing really to tell about him."

"His eyes? Hair? What color?"

"Well, now, I didn't notice."

"And his beard?"

"Red, perhaps, like yours, eh?" said the old lady, smiling.

"No, mistress, black. Oh, yes, very black."

"And you got off alive?" cried the host. "Well, it just beats me!"

"Yes," said the merchant. "It was at an inn, just below Nijni Novgorod. I was supping as he came in. The innkeeper said to me, 'That's Charmak, there.' So I hurried out." He smiled again as the others laughed.

"But why don't they catch him then?" cried the old nobleman, bringing his fist down on the table with all his might. "The scoundrels, those peasants. Why didn't they tie him? Bind him? It just beats me!"

"Eh—your Honor," said the merchant. "The poor people have nothing against these robbers. Even if their huts are burned down, what of that? They are used to misfortunes. And Charmak seldom kills them, you know. Only if they get in his way. Aye, your Honor. Many a time he has had his meals at some inn full of people, and he eats and drinks and out he goes, and they know it's him, but they only bow to him, very low, too. It's only us merchants and such as you, your Honor, that would have given a fine price for his head. The peasants! What would they gain?"

The conversation, as every conversation at that particular time eventually did, turned now definitely on and about the famous robber. Every one had some story, anecodote or rumor to tell concerning that devil Charmak. Every one supposed, was sure, thought this and that.

The nobleman's pretty daughter and the handsome Hussar alone took no part in the animated gossip. They could talk now of their own affairs, unheard by the others, the young girl bending over her embroidery frame and the young man, his hand on the back of her chair, bending in his turn over her curly brown head.

"No, Alexander, I'm afraid it's no use," said the girl in a whisper.

"Did you speak to your father?" asked the officer.

"To mother. Just hinted. No—they will never let me marry you."

"Is it because my father is low born?"

The girl nodded.

"But I will never love any one but you, Alexander," she said. "Never. And don't be so sad. Perhaps something will happen and then father will give his permission."

"What can happen?"

"Shh! Perhaps if your father gets very rich indeed. Or if you do something wonderful. Something great. Catch Stepan Charmak, for instance." She laughed a little at her joke.

"Oh, it's no use. But you will come into the garden tonight? The summer-house, as always? We must talk it over."

"I will come, yes. But you will never persuade me to marry you in secret, Alexander." She raised her clear eyes to his for a moment, then again bowed over her work. "So you must never talk to me about it. I will come, yes. At nine—"

"What are you whispering about, you two?" cried the old nobleman pleasantly from his chair.

He saw no danger in this friendship of his daughter with the young Hussar. The son of a former serf! He would shrug his shoulders whenever his wife spoke about it.

"We were talking about Stepan Charmak," said the young girl quickly.

"We, too. Ha-ha. That devil! That Charmak! It just beats me!" He brought his fist down on the table with all his might as was his habit when excited, pleasantly or otherwise. "I do hope to see him some day! Eh—how I'd love to meet him. I'd show him! Eh?"

"They do really say," his wife was saying to the merchant, "that Charmak is a runaway serf. Now I wonder if that's true."

"Eh, madam," cried the nobleman. "And if he is? There are thousands of these runaway serfs. But surely that would be no clue as to his accomplices and followers. What do you say, merchant?

And you, Vorodin? Of course not. My father now. He had one serf, I remember, who ran away. You know, Vorodin. He was your friend—" he turned to the withered country squire who had sat very quiet and silent since the entrance of the merchant, only blinking his eyes nervously and clasping and unclasping his hands. "Remember him, that serf? The red haired one. Remember? He ran away. A year or so before you bought yourself out he ran away."

Vorodin paled, blinked his eyes and said very quietly:

"Hmm—red haired? Do you say red haired? Yes, yes—so he was. But that was years ago." He blinked again and looked askance at the merchant's red beard.

"And, anyway, that man—I mean, they say this Charmak is a runaway monk," he added quickly, suddenly meeting the level gaze with which the merchant was regarding him.

"Do they, now? A monk?" cried the host. "Is that why he is afraid of women? They say he never married. And he keeps away from women. Just terrified of them. Think of it? A robber, too. It just beats me."

"He is afraid of women, yes," said the merchant. "But it's not because he was a monk once. Though he might have been, for all I know. He is afraid of women because—because it has been foretold him that he will meet his death through a woman."

"Through a woman? How, now?"

"Of this nothing had been foretold," answered the merchant with a deep sigh. "Through a woman. But how? When? Where? The Lord only knows."

"Poor fellow," said the girl at the embroidery frame.

THE servants brought in the candles. The windows were black now with the night outside. A wind was rising. The bare branches scratched at the panes. Somewhere in another part of the house an unhinged shutter kept knocking loudly against the outer wall. The rush and moan of the river Volga, which passed below the gardens, could be heard distinctly above all other sounds.

The women rolled up their work. The merchant rose, bowed low to the host, to the hostess, to every one in the room, slowly, in his dignified, truly merchant manner, saying:

"Thank you. The Lord bless you. Thank you, thank you."

Then he bowed three times and very low to the corner with the ikons, crossed himself slowly and went out. They could hear his horse beating its hoofs impatiently in the drive. Then the sound of brisk trotting past the windows, diminishing swiftly down the drive.

Vorodin and his son now took their leave. It was a dark night, windy and cold. But the garden was full of the sweet smell of budding trees, and occasionally, in the intervals between the cold blasts of the strengthening wind, there would rise from the wet earth a whiff of warm, genuine Spring air. Now and then the silver edge of the new moon would be revealed for a moment out of the mass of heavy black clouds which seemed chasing each other continually over the great expanse of the night skies. The father and son then would catch a glimpse of the tall slightly swaying yews which bordered their path, the entangled and naked branches of the gardens which sloped down to the wet silvered cliffs below which the broad Volga, black, blue and silver in the intermittent moonlight, roared and moaned like some great giant panting for breath. On the opposite bank loomed like a tall black wall the dense Boorov Woods.

The little squire and his son walked quickly. Their lands lay adjacent to the gardens of the old nobleman. A small gate in the hedge connected the two estates. The young Hussar whistled gaily all the way and, his thoughts busy with the approaching rendezvous, he failed to remark anything unusual in the little old man by his side.

On reaching their house he at once went up to his room, saying that he would sleep and was not to be disturbed on any account. The bells calling to midnight mass would wake him up. He did not sleep however. As soon as the silence all around him told him that the whole household had turned in for a few hours' nap, he made his way stealthily downstairs. In the hall he picked up an old cloak of his father's and, throwing this voluminous garment over his brilliant uniform, went out into the garden. He took a short cut across the orchards and was soon hurrying along the familiar yew walk toward the summerhouse in the Boolat-Zadonski garden.

Two hours later saw him again crossing the orchards and making his way stealthily around the various farm buildings at the back of the Vorodin house and toward the front door past the old stables. Here he stopped suddenly. Through the thin cracked walls of the stable, there came to him the sound of his father's voice, plaintive, whimpering, as if the old man were on the verge of tears.

"Why should I lock him up?" he was saying. "What are you up to? Tell me. You frighten me."

"What about our bargain?" answered the other voice, deep, assured.

The young Hussar, his ear to the wall, thought the voice remarkably familiar, but he could not connect it with any one he knew.

"I've been keeping my part of the bargain these twenty years," went on the deep, familiar voice. "How many rubles have I given over to you? And for what? Just for sleeping in this old stable once a month or so. Haven't I your word that you'd lend a hand should I need it, and have I ever asked it? Now that I do, it's nay. What's the matter with you, Anton?"

"But why must I lock my son in his room? What are you up to?" whimpered the little squire.

"Because I'm paying a visit to your neighbor tonight. No, don't answer me! Listen, Vorodin, my men are waiting in the Boorov Woods. They have their boats there. As soon as the big bell begins to toll for the midnight mass and every one starts for church, they will cross the river, set fire to the village, and make for the old nobleman's house. There'll be no one there to bother us. The fire in the village will keep them there for quite awhile, and meanwhile we'll take all we can, go down to the boats, cross the river, then to saddle and away. You see?

"Lock the door of your son's room. He's asleep, you say. So why worry? He'll never know it was you. He is on the second floor. He looks pretty strong, that son of your's, but no giant even, could break those iron bars on your windows. And the door is solid oak. Nothing to be done there. And even should he get out after all, his soldiers are ten miles away. It will be too late. We'll be gone before he gets to them. And who's afraid of soldiers if their officer is absent? No Hussar will move a foot without the captain's order. Understand now, Vorodin?"

"Never, never will I do it," returned Vorodin passionately. "Take pity on me! How can I play such a trick on my son? You know it's for his sake solely that I struck this bargain with you twenty years ago. It's to save him from being a serf, a slave, that I took the first money from you to buy my own and his freedom and to start a new life of a freeman. It's to make him happy that I've been taking money from you all these years, and will go on taking as long as you give it to me. I must be rich. Very rich. Alexander is in love with that girl and Zadonski will never consent to the match unless perhaps I'm fabulously wealthy."

"Well," returned the deep voice. "Can't you see I'm playing right into your hands, Anton? That's why I thought you'd be only too glad to help me. That old nobleman won't have an extra shirt left, after our visit. He'll be glad to—"

"But I would be making a traitor of my son. It's his duty to get you, at least to try. That's what he was sent here for.

Listen to me now!" The little squire's voice grew suddenly strong with anger and despair. "Rob any one you like! Kill them! Murder then! Slash their throats! Enjoy yourself to your heart's content—but don't you touch Zadonski!"

"Oho!" said the deep voice slowly. "A regular commander, ha? What a fool you are, Anton. Listen, now. This will be my last work, see? There's enough in that man's storerooms to last me and my men the rest of our lives. We will go to Nijni Novgorod then, or even farther away, and settle down and begin straight. Tired I am of this playing around. I no longer enjoy it. Moreover, something tells me it's time for me to stop. What if some woman after all—" the deep voice sounded hollow with superstitious fear—"will get into my life. Then it's my end. And living the life I do, they seem just everywhere, these women. Just keeping their hands off me, it's some work. But once I go straight, they'll never come near me. Help me, Vorodin. Come, comrade, is it yes?"

"No!"

"Good. Then I will make it known where it is I hide when they send those regiments out for my head."

The young Hussar heard the speaker make a movement as if to leave the stable. He stepped back hastily into the bushes. But no one came out. Once more he put his ear to the stable wall.

"Well, then I'll just change here," the deep voice was saying gaily.

Apparently the little squire had given in.

"Some dress! Ha!" went on the deep voice. "Come, give me those boots and fix these spurs on. They are silver. I got them last week. And a fine man he was, I must say. It was a pity to cut his pretty throat."

The young Hussar shuddered involuntarily.

As yet he could think of nothing but the awful discovery of his father's crime. His father the accomplice of this robber! Charmak, of course. But why did the robber's voice sound so familiar?

"Shame, shame," he kept repeating to himself, thinking of his father.

"My poor Mashenka," he thought suddenly of the nobleman's daughter. "It can never be now."

At this he began to think of how to forestall the robber's plans. He could indeed hasten to their neighborhood, return with a handful of men and Charmak would be in his hands. But the band? It had been said that Charmak's band sometimes numbered as many as a hundred men. Even if only fifty, on the first toll of the church bell the robbers would be coming here, and Zadonski, Mashenka . . .? Send a messenger to his soldiers with an order? Would they believe the messenger? The soldiers were getting tired already of the jokes played on them by the populace in connection with their repeated failures to catch Charmak. And could any one be trusted with a message nowadays? The peasants? No. Servants? No. They all admired Charmak. Many of them were in his pay.

IT WAS but one hour of midnight. His detachment was ten miles away. The young Hussar turned and, with one hand holding the dark cloak about him, with the other pushing back the branches, he dashed into the bushes, through the garden, across the road. Once in the fields he began to run in the direction of the hamlet where his soldiers were stationed. He avoided the main road and lanes, afraid that he might be recognized and his purpose surmised by some forerunner of Charmak's band. And so he ran on along the muddy fields and pastures, stumbling, falling, picking himself up quickly; and panting painfully, he climbed gates, leaped hedges, the long folds of his cloak hindering his progress a great deal, yet he was afraid to dispose of it lest his scarlet and gold uniform, now that the skies had cleared and the landscape was flooded with moonlight, might attract the curiosity of some peasant.

The wind had abated somewhat. Just a warm breeze touched his flushed cheeks. All around him the silvered countryside lay still and perfectly silent save for the moan of the rushing waters of the Volga, far below the wet black cliffs on his left.

Suddenly this silence and stillness, this serene peace of the warm spring night, was as if drowned in a single, astonishingly loud and overwhelmingly heavy blow of the great bell from the tall belfry of the village church far away. Ominously it resounded and reechoed throughout the moonlit landscape. And then gaily, swiftly came the peal of numerously smaller bells, ringing on and on, without ceasing. Everything around the young Hussar seemed to brighten up instantly. He looked over his shoulder.

From out of the distant treetops which marked his native village where the hundred small bells continued to peal gaily, there suddenly shot heavenward a single yellow tongue of flame; fell, leaped up once more, others rose leaping and swaying, falling and shooting upward again, and immediately the skies grew red, then scarlet and purple, reflecting the rapidly spreading conflagration.

The Hussar ran on.

And meanwhile the village church was speedily emptied of the brightly attired holiday crowd of men, women and children, the peasants hurrying toward their thatched huts with the hope of saving something of their property. The village street was in a tumult. Cries, wails, shouts tore the air, already thick with the heat and smoke of the fire.

Women ran about aimlessly, dragging their children, who yelled and sobbed with fright. Wives struggled with their husbands, who made to jump into the flames, and the men swore and beat them furiously.

The old nobleman would have stayed to direct his excited peasants, but his daughter, troubled by her sweetheart's non-appearance in church, implored him to go home. Ordering his servants to stay and help the villagers, Zadonski then hastened homeward with his wife and daughter.

Once in their garden, they halted in astonishment. The great house sparkled with lights as if illuminated for some festival. Across the windows in the second story shadows of large, stooping men moved to and fro, as if they were moving about something of great weight.

"Well, it just beats me!" cried the old nobleman, shaking his great fist. "These foolish servants are dragging everything out of the house. As if the fire could reach here. They must have hurried here while we watched the fire, the fools!"

The hall was empty. But in the very first room which they made to enter, and whose doors were flung wide open, some ten brightly dressed, coarse featured men were gathered about the great barrel of the old nobleman's favorite wine, dipping the old nobleman's best silver mugs for its contents and throwing back their heads, and holding the mugs to their open mouths, emptying them at a gulp.

A bit away, on the edge of the great oak table, sat a man in a red silk shirt, with red mustache, red beard—the erstwhile dignified stranger, traveler and honest merchant.

"Charmak!" cried the astonished master of the house.

If some historian of a later date could but have seen the famous robber at that moment, he would have understood perhaps, would have shared even, that awe and admiration which the personality of Stepan Charmak inspired in the common people.

There was something heroic, magnificent indeed, in that indolent pose of his as he sat there on the edge of the great oak table, one hand on his hip, black eyes flinging lightning here and there as he looked about him, strong white teeth flashing persistently in the midst of the red beard and red mustache. His short red hair gave a dash of recklessness and gaiety to his strong, perfectly shaped head. His left hand

on the polished boot of one long leg which he held thrown across the knee of the other, he swayed his broad shoulders in the red silk of the high necked full shirt while he let the other leg dangle indolently in the air.

No wonder that to the mass of the drab, dull, sullen peasantry, against the background of the monotonous, toiling existence of that century, the only existence they knew, he arose like a personification of that reckless joy of living for which all unknowingly they had been starving their hearts out through the endless generations.

"The devil!" shouted the old nobleman on the threshold, his face the bright hue of his holiday boots. "Is that how you return my hospitality? You dirty dog. You—"

Charmak gave an almost imperceptible sign with his hand and in a few seconds Gerasim Ivanovitch found himself sitting in a chair, two huge men binding his feet and arms securely to that heavy piece of furniture.

"Your Honor, your health!" cried Charmak, receiving a silver mug of wine from the hands of one of the robbers. "Tell your women, your Honor, to keep quiet. I've eaten your bread and salt and can not kill you, so why worry? We won't keep you long."

"Well, comrades," he shouted to his men who were dragging trunks and boxes from the storerooms in the attic down the stairs and through the hall, how soon will you be done?"

"In a jiffy, Chief," the men shouted back in a chorus.

"Now, your Honor, what will you have?" said Charmak, smiling good humoredly. "Vodka? Pickles? Bread? Don't tell me I don't know the rules of hospitality."

"Scoundrel," returned the nobleman contemptuously.

"Oh, your Honor," began the famous robber—then stopped and listened.

"What's that? That noise?" He snatched his pistol from his belt and jumped off the table.

"The Hussars!" came the loud cry from the stairs and hall.

"The Hussars!" shouted the robbers as they rushed into the room and surrounded their leader.

"How near?" asked Charmak.

"Nearing the avenue. The captain just went through the first gate."

"Vorodin's doing, the traitor," said Charmak slowly. "Now—" he looked about him quickly. "The door into the hall. Bolt it!"

The heavy bolt went down.

"Now, comrades, the back door. Into the back yard and take the path to the river. Keep calm now. Eyes open and heads clear. Go. Cross the river and wait for me in the Woods. I must dally a bit. A debt to pay. Go on."

Almost instantly the room was emptied of the band.

"One sound, and I shoot," Charmak said to the nobleman, and waved his pistol at the fainting women.

He walked to the window, flung it open and, his pistol in hand and his back against the wall, he waited, listening.

THERE came the sound of approaching hoofs and the noise and clatter of the dismounting Hussars in the drive.

Charmak leaned against the sill, then leaned out swiftly and pulled the trigger. A volley of shots answered. Bullets whistled past, entering the paneling.

Charmak sprang aside with the lithe movement of a tiger.

"Missed him," he cried. "No matter, another time. And I'll get the father too."

He ran toward the side door leading into the back rooms, but from there came the heavy steps of Hussars. Soldiers were smashing at the door opening into the hall.

"Gerasim Ivanovitch!" shouted young Vorodin in the hall.

The heavy door gave in, fell, and at the same time from the side and back entrance Hussars rushed into the room.

"Here's your end!" cried the old nobleman. "Repent, thief."

"Not yet!" cried the robber. "Here's my shield."

And he snatched into his arms the nobleman's daughter, and jumped on to the window sill.

"Now shoot, brothers," he said and leaped into the night.

The Hussars followed. But in the garden they paused, irresolute. Charmak had vanished. They dashed in different directions, young Vorodin making toward the river, and there on the cliffs, not twenty yards away from him, he saw Charmak with the young girl in his arms, both illuminated sharply with the reflected glare of the conflagration which simultaneously lighted up the Boorov Woods on the opposite bank, the rushing waters of the Volga far below, and on the waves the two long, narrow boats filled with robbers rowing swiftly toward the Woods.

At the shout which involuntarily escaped the young Hussar, the men in the boats turned their heads, saw the robber with the girl in his arms, ceased rowing and, resting on their oars, waited for their leader.

Charmak swiftly laid his fainting burden on the ground and made to leap into the river. But his spur become entangled in the girl's long skirts. He tripped, and with an oath, half terror, half bitterness, went catapulting down. Far below he crashed on the projecting rocks and disappeared forever in the rushing and moaning waters of the Volga.

If William Walker HAD BEEN THERE

By ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE

ADVENTURE readers may recall the publication in these pages some time ago of the personal narrative of one Alfred P. DeShields, late of Red Bluff, California, who professed to have been a recruit under William Walker, conqueror of Nicaragua. More recently the writer, in a prowl through the ghost mining towns of the Sierras, stumbled upon another sidelight on the many angled life of the "blue-eyed man of destiny"—fascinating because of the hypothetical "if" involved.

It was in the little town of Downieville, seat of Sierra County, California, and one time hell-roarin' camp. All up and down the two forks of the Yuba, at whose juncture nestles the old town, you can see the piles of cobbles along the stream beds marking the old placers. These give you a picture: gold crazed men with their wing dams, their sluices and their waterwheels rooting furiously in the gold-bearing sands, spending riotously over Downieville's bars on nights of revelry.

An old resident of the town showed me a faded photograph of Downieville taken

some time in the Eighties, pointing as he did so to a bridge—long since replaced—which spanned the Yuba.

"There's where they hung the Spanish girl," he said startlingly. "You can read about it in here."

He placed before me a very old scrapbook, the pages turned to some pasted columns of newsprint which showed neither the date nor the name of the newspaper from which they had been clipped. My informant said he thought they were from a San Francisco paper of fifteen or twenty years back. The article purported to be an interview with Charles N. Felton, one time Congressman from California, wherein he told of witnessing the lynching there at that old Downieville bridge.

It was in 1851, as Felton was quoted, that the Yuba County Democratic convention was held in Downieville—Sierra County had not yet been cut away from Yuba. Up from Marysville in the valley below came a remarkable group of men as delegates: William Walker, who was to serve as chairman of the convention; Stephen J. Field, who was destined to fill a place on the United States Supreme Court bench; Charles, Lord Fairfax, the last of the noble Fairfaxes of England; William M. Stewart, later United States Senator from Nevada, and Felton.

The convention completed its labors in a general atmosphere of revelry on the part of Downieville, proud to take from Marysville the honor of so weighty an occasion. But on the last night of its session a man named Cannon, a roughneck whose only qualification to lift him above the ruck of the miners was that he spoke Spanish, tried in a drunken spirit of bravado to break into the house of a young Spanish woman and, after an uproar, was pulled away by friends.

The following morning Cannon, still drunk, saw the Spanish girl standing on her doorstep and commenced reviling her in her native tongue. She modestly turned aside, drew a tiny dagger from her stocking and plunged it into Cannon's heart.

Before ever news of the murder had been bruited about the camp, Walker with a few of his companions had saddled up and started down the cañon trail for Marysville. Perhaps that very fact was responsible for the blood passion which subsequently mounted—for already the young Tennesseean had established a reputation for leadership over men. At any rate, the rougher element of the camp decided this last was one too many murders and, woman or no woman, it was time for an example to be set.

The unfortunate Spanish girl—hard digging in annals of the time does not yield me her name—was seized, tried by a "judge" and twelve "jurymen" and sentenced to be hanged. This without a word of defense from her, because the only man who could act as interpreter had died by her hand.

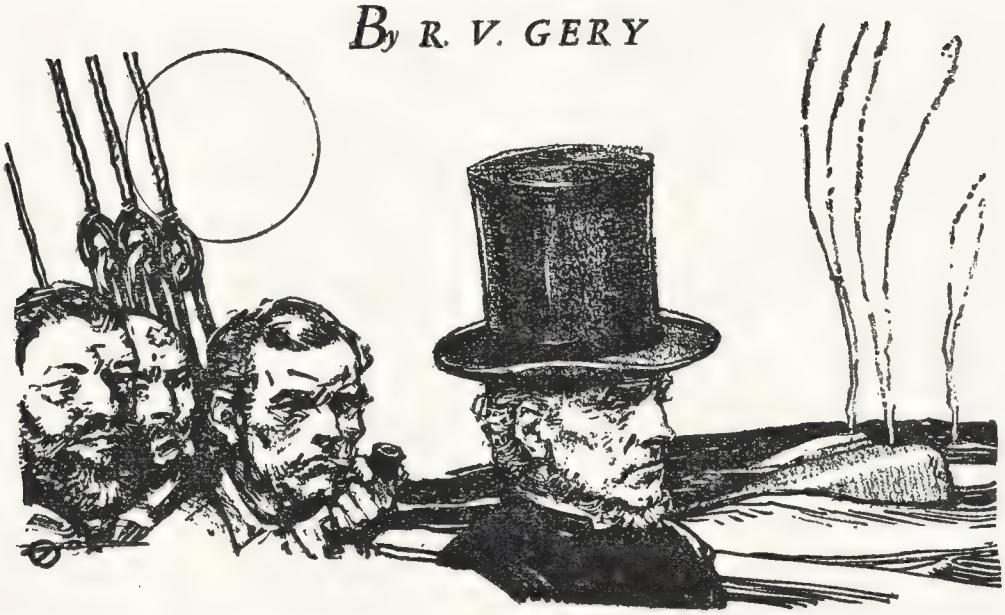
Meanwhile that part of the Marysville contingent who had remained in Downieville got wind of what was afoot and sent hard riders down-trail to overtake Walker and bring him back to plead with the mob for a stay of execution. They pinned their hopes on the young Tennesseean's well known gift of oratory to stem the blood tide.

What might have happened if William Walker could have been overtaken on that wild mountain trail and brought back to face the lynchers is a matter for speculation. But as it happened, he was not overtaken.

In desperation Stephen J. Field, he who years later was to be elevated to the Supreme Court, intercepted the crowd as it marched the unfortunate woman before it toward the bridge. He mounted a whisky keg and, at some peril of his own life, made an impassioned plea for mercy. One Samuel Spear, a Marysville lawyer, answered him by the old, old wolf cry for vengeance.

The Spanish girl, who had dressed herself in her gayest colors and with a new Panama on her head, stepped unfalteringly up to the rail of the bridge and adjusted the noose about her throat. Then she was pushed off.

By R. V. GERY



Jonah Jones

A STORY OF THE SEA

THE big freighter nosed ponderously out of the dock and passed the anchored *Levuka* so close that you could have tossed the proverbial biscuit on to her decks. Challis, the *Levuka's* second mate, watched her slow, dignified progress until she was almost abreast of us. Then he suddenly peered under his hand at a small man leaning placidly over her port rail.

"Well, swelp me," he observed, half to himself. "If it ain't old Jonah Jones. Ahoy, Jonah! 'Ow's prophesyin'?"

The little man on the other ship—I now perceived him to be wearing clothes of funereal black, a white tie, and a pot hat of tremendous respectability—looked up, saw Challis, and forthwith began an absolute dance of rage on the steel deck. As an accompaniment he emitted a torrent of what appeared to be abuse, couched in a guttural, rippling tongue that was strange to me. Challis grinned at him as the freighter inexorably took him past us and out of sight.

" 'E's off on one of 'is voyages again, eh? A fair cough drop, old Jonah is. Ever 'ear about 'im?"

I said I thought not. One does not stifle one of that big man's yarns—and anyhow it was true; Jonah Jones was a stranger to me.

"What language was that he was talking?" I asked, to get Challis well started. He lighted his pipe and laughed.

"Welsh," he said. "Shockin' stuff, ain't it? But Jonah don't talk anything else when 'e's mad—an' that little remark o' mine about prophesyin' started 'im off, as well I knew it would."

"What's he doing on that freighter?" I asked. "He's in a funny rig for a deck-

hand, don't you think?"

"Deck'and!" Challis laughed again. " 'E ain't no deck'and. 'E's a passenger. That's one o' the Prince Line, an' Jonah's free of 'em, to come an' go as 'e likes. Draws a pension, 'e does, like a dook, an' all their masters 'as orders to carry 'im wherever 'e likes. So once or twice a year old Jonah 'e dolls 'imself up like you saw an' down to the dock with 'im, with 'is little gladstone bag in 'is 'and, an' there's some poor devil of a skipper's goin' to 'ave 'is life made a little hell for 'im for awhile. That freighter's goin' to Auckland an' back—Leggatt's 'er master; an' Jonah'll have him 'alf crazy by the time she's past Plymouth. I know 'im."

Challis paused and I gave him the necessary prod.

"How do you know all this?" I asked. "And what's the matter with the old man?"

"I know it," said Challis deliberately, "because I sailed as Fourth a couple o' trips with Jonah. An' as for what's the matter with 'im, 'e's a prophet, as you may 'ave heard me 'int just now."

"Oh, come," I said. "I'm a bit of a liar myself, but—"

"All right, listen an' see."

'E come [said Challis] out of Barry Dock, did Jonah, an' 'e's a Welshman, as you might expect. Forty year ago it must be 'e went to sea first—long before my time, o' course. Matter of fact, I never struck 'im until just before the war—1912 it must 'ave been. I'd just got me ticket, an' was cocked up no end about it, specially as a line like the Prince people 'ad taken me on. They was good in them days; still are, as far's that goes. An' they've still got Jonah.

It was in that same Barry Dock I see 'im first. The old *Prince o' Wales*—that's the one that was torpedoed afterwards—was signin' on a crew, an' me bein' Fourth an' a new 'and as you might say, the master put me to seein' 'em aboard an' settled down. I was standin' at the top o' the gangway, lookin' them over as they come up, when 'ere's this little squirt at the foot of it, gapin' up at me.

'E wasn't any great ways different to what you see 'im just now. Might 'ave been any age—I'd lay a good bit he's pretty nigh on seventy this minute—with a nanny goat beard on 'im, an' got up perishin' respectable, like a parson on 'oliday. Matter o' fact, that's what I thought 'e was with 'is black coat an' white choker.

"Is this the *Prince o' Wales*, Mister?" he asks, very polite.

"It is," says I. "But we're signin' on just at present. Don't want any salvation this mornin'," says I, bein' young an' flippant, "an' there's the way up the dock"

He starts to come up the gangway.

"*The Prince o' Wales*," says 'e, waggin' his silly old beard. "Eh—a fine vessel, a noble gallant vessel whatever! An' you'll be the fourth officer, young man? Indeed I'm pleased to see ye, although ye've a smart tongue on ye. Take these now—" 'e opens 'is bag an' fumbles in it— "an' may they improve ye."

An' begosh if he don't 'and me a bunch o' tracts.

"WELL," I says, not bein' used to tracts anyway, "thankin' you all the same, grandpa, perhaps you'll let me get on with my work, an' come back later. See the skipper," I says. "'E might be interested in bein' saved." Which I'd no doubt 'e would be, seein' 'e was a proper bit of hot stuff, was Lygon.

"Indeed to goodness!" says 'is nibs. "Then the gentleman an' me will be 'avin' conversations, look you. For," 'e says, "it's not often that a master 'as a prophet aboard with 'im."

"Prophet?" says I, stupid-like.

"The prophet Jonah, no less," 'e says, smilin' to 'imself.

Well, one runs across all kinds, at sea, an' I've seen some queer balmy ones in my time; but this was a bit out o' the way.

"Look 'ere, Jonah," I says to 'im, "all that's very int'restin', an' I've no doubt Captain Lygon'll be de-lighted to meet

you, an' the whale too, when he's disengaged. But just at present he's occupied commandin' this 'ooker, an' 'e's arsked me to convey 'is regrets to you that 'is many dooties don't permit 'im to 'ave that pleasure. Do you quite comprehend?" I asks him. "If so, there's the wharf—"

"I'm sailin' on this vessel," he says, matter-of-fact.

"Wot!" I yells at him. "You? Say that again, uncle!"

'E don't say anythin', but pulls out his ticket, showin' 'e's signed on as deck-'and. Ebenezer Jones, 'is name is.

"Well, may I be eternally sugared!" says I. "You 'op it off for'ard, you penitential, psalm singin' old 'umbug, you! 'Andin' tracts, swelp me, to a ship's officer! Go on—get for'ard with you; I'll look into this later, me man."

'E looks at me a minute, very old fashioned. Then 'e mumbles somethin' that sounds like "The cracklin' of thorns," 'umps his gladstone bag, an' away for'ard with 'im.

About twenty minutes later I'm interviewed by three or four of the new 'ands.

"Beg pardon, sir," says one of them, awkward. "We'd like a word with you."

"Well?" I says, short, the way a young officer does.

"It's this man Jones that's just come aboard, sir—" 'e says, an' stops, doubtful.

"Well, what about 'im?"

The chap looks round at the others.

"We've sailed with 'im before, sir," says he, "an', beggin' your pardon once more, sir, 'e's a Jonah."

"So 'e told me," I says. "What about it? Suppose 'e does think 'e's a prophet?"

The man grins.

"It ain't that, sir," says 'e. "We ain't got no objections to a man's lettin' on to be the Apostle Paul, savin' your presence, sir, providin' 'e takes 'is trick an' does 'is share an' don't interefere with nobody. But this 'ere Jones ain't like that. We knows 'im of old. 'E's a Jonah."

"Good Lord love a duck!" I says. "You ain't got that tomfool business into your 'eads, men? What's the old codger been doin'?"

"It's like this, sir—so long's 'e's quiet-like there ain't a better seaman afloat. But—" the fellow 'esitates again—"you let 'im get started on 'is prophecy business, an' there's trouble. We've seen it before."

"Wodjer mean?" I asks 'em, a bit shirty.

" 'E says things are goin' to 'appen," the bloke sticks again.

"Come on—out with it! An' then?"

"An'—an' then they 'appens," says the man. "Besides, sir, 'e's a Jonah. The ship's unlucky that 'e sails with."

At that I lost me rag with 'em proper.

"That'll be enough out of you," I says. "You keep that tale for Captain Lygon—an' I 'ope you go to 'im with it! Jonah me eye! Get off for'ard now, the lot o' you, an' don't let me hear any more of it. Slippy!"

And that was that, as far as I was concerned. I went on with my checkin' in, an' by an' by the Third comes aboard an' relieves me, an' what with one thing an' another I never give Jonah Jones another thought that night.

At dawn we sails, an' I was down in the s'loon round about eight bells, just startin' my breakfast, when 'ere comes the Old Man under forced draft an' with a face like a dose o' salts.

"What crosseyed son of a swab's let Jonah Jones on my ship?" he says, very vicious.

The chief puts down his knife and fork with a clatter.

"What's that ye're sayin', sir?" he asks, anxious. "We've no that ill favored auld caterpillar with us again?"

"We have indeed, Mr. McOstrich," says the Old Man, breathin' 'eavy through 'is red nose. "An' if you'll tell me 'oo it was let 'im set foot aboard without droppin' 'im into the drink, I'll—I'll keelhaul 'im," he says.

I LOOKS down at me porridge very innocent-like, but it wasn't no use, o' course. He 'ad it out of me in five minutes, an' some pretty chin music I got, I tell you.

Lygon was generally brimstone-an'-sulphur for a day or so, till 'e'd got the shore Scotch out of 'is system, but this time 'e'd got somethin' 'e could catch 'old of—which was me—an' by the time 'e'd finished I was wishin' I'd gone for a soldier. 'Twasn't my fault, o' course—it was the agent 'ad taken Jonah on; but that didn't 'elp me any.

"Listen 'ere, me young shaver," 'e ends up by sayin'. "There's masters in this line that'd about-ship straightaway, an' pitch that man off on to the dock side, an' you after him! Ain't you ever 'eard o' him before? By cripes," 'e says, "they ought to make 'im a special subject at the Board o' Trade examinations—seamanship, navigation, an' Jonah Jones! 'E's a mortal terror on the 'igh seas."

"'Ow's that, sir?" I asks, for I was beginnin' to get me breath again.

"'Ow? 'Ow! There's not a vessel on this line, nor a crew, that 'e's not ruined, one time an' another, with this Jonah business of 'is. Says 'e's Jonah himself—"

"Which is rank blasphemous, as well as bein' unlucky," cuts in the chief.

"—an' starts in foretellin' trouble," the Old Man goes on. "An' it's a damned odd thing, Mr. Challis—an' I don't believe in superstition—but it's a sacred fact that just as often as 'e starts comin' his Jonah lay an' prophesyin', trouble's sure to follow. Ain't that so, Mr. McOstrich?"

The chief nods.

"Last time," 'e says, "the wee deevil 'ad a revelation was off the Fastnet, ye'll recollect—an' we limped into Rio four days behind time with a cracked shaft."

"An' the time before that it was smallpox," said the Old Man.

At that the first officer sticks 'is head round the s'loon door.

"You'd better come up, sir," he says to Lygon, very perturbed. Lygon glares at 'im.

"What is it?" he asks. "Not—?"

The First nods his head.

"'E's got 'em again, sir," 'e says gloomily.

The Old Man rips out a fathom an' a 'alf of blazes.

"Come on up, you," he says to me, "an' see what you've let us in for."

We were well down the Bristol Channel by now, with the coast loomin' up clear to the east, an' the ship liftin' to the first of the deep sea. Lygon goes up on to the bridge, an' we looks down into the forward well.

True enough, there was the old blatherumskite 'avin' what McOstrich called his "revelation". You never saw such an 'orrid spectacle.

In the first place, 'e was starko—'adn't got a rag on 'is skinny old corpse. That was sufficiently metagrobolizin', I give you me word, for 'e wasn't any Venus, not at the best o' times. Now 'e looked like a peeled monkey more'n anything else.

'E was dancin' up an' down the deck, carryin' on in Welsh somethink outrageous an' wavin' 'is pipestems of arms above 'is 'ead. What 'e was sayin' there wasn't any of us knew, but it was pretty thick, by the way 'e was rollin' 'is eyes an' stampin' to an' fro; 'e'd got 'em bad, whatever it was.

I WAS young in them times, as I believe I've said; and 'e made me laugh, prancin' there.

"Silly old coot!" I says out loud. "'E's loony!"

Lygon 'ears me an' swings round.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" 'e asks. "Then just you go down an' bring 'im up 'ere to me. Loony or not, 'e's not goin' to carry on that way on my ship."

I ran down the ladder an' went up to 'im, with most of the ship's company lookin' on.

"Come on, grandpa," I says, catchin' 'im by the shoulder. "Captain wants you. Come on up to the nice bridge."

'E whirls round on me, an' starts in worse than ever with 'is gibberish; so I fairly takes 'im by the scruff an' runs him neck an' crop up the ladder.

"'Ere you are, sir," I says to Lygon.

Now I expected Lygon to eat the old scamp alive, 'is temper bein' what it was; but I expected wrong. 'E'd an eye, no

doubt, on the crew, that was 'uddled under the focsle, watchin' proceedin's pretty anxious, an' I reckon 'e didn't want trouble from 'em. I didn't know then, d'ye see, what kind of a strangle hold this 'ere Jonah Jones could get on a ship that knowed him.

Before Lygon could speak, the old chap pipes up, very shrill an' nasty.

"Take me up!" says 'e. "Take me up an' cast me forth into the sea! For Jonah of old am I, an' I bring evil to the vessel, an' evil to the mariners. An' as for this young man, cast him forth with me, that laid 'and on a prophet!"

There was a kind of half groan from McOstrich, that was standing behind Lygon, an' I 'eard 'im mutter, "Boilers, at the verra least, this time!" An' the crew for'ard groaned too.

Lygon speaks to the old fraud, that's standin' on the bridge of a nine-thousand-ton freighter without a stitch between 'im an' the sky.

"Now, now, Jones," he says, pacifyin'. "There's enough o' this, me man. You must stop it now—you're upsettin' the ship. Go below an' lie down, there's a good fellow." I believe I needn't tell you that for a certified master mariner in steam to use that tone to a naked deck-'and on 'is own bridge is—unusual.

Jonah don't do nothin' at all but go off into another bust of fireworks in Welsh. 'E's enjoyin' 'imself fine, as I can see.

Lygon turns to me after a minute of it.

"Mister Challis," says 'e, "this is a job for you. You've annoyed 'im; an' now you'd better take 'im below an' make much of 'im, or 'e'll be 'avin' more of 'is tantrums."

"Very good, sir," I says, for there might be somethin' in that. "Come along, dad. Let's go down an' see if there's anything nice downstairs."

Well, you'd never credit some o' the things that old codger said to me as I was leadin' him away—an' after I got 'im down in the focsle it was ten times worse. Throwin' me overside was the least little thing 'e was desirous of doin', or 'avin' the 'ands do, an' there wasn't anything I could do or say that'd alter 'im. Finally I give it up, an' went an' reported to the master.

"Well?" says 'e; by jiminy if 'e wasn't quite anxious. "Get 'im smoothed over?"

"No, sir," I said. "I did not." My own idea was that this Jones ought to be in irons or a strait-weskit, but it didn't do to 'int that, o' course.

Lygon curses again.

"Very well," 'e says at last. "You see, now; there'll not be a fortnight before there's trouble on this ship."

The *Prince o' Wales* was on the Africa run—general cargo to West Coast ports, then the Cape, then up the East Coast an' home through the Mediterranean. For a while things went along fine—Jonah recovered 'imself an' did 'is work as good as the next man, the ship shook down into routine, an' even Lygon began to get a bit more pleasant. Still, there was a kind of a something 'angin' over us—a jinx, you might call it—an' I believe the 'ole ship was lookin' for trouble. Every one but me, that is. I didn't take any stock in such things.

At Lagos it 'it us. Lygon went ashore, an' come back lookin' sicker than muck. He comes into the s'loon at dinner time with a cable in 'is 'and.

"Told you so," 'e says to McOstrich, throwin' it across to 'im.

The chief reads it an' rolls up 'is eyes.

"The guid Lord look down on us!" 'e says. "It's worse — far worse — than cracked shafts, or smallpox, or e'en a burrst boiler! Ye'd 'ave done better, sir, to throw the auld tyke overside back yonder."

They sat gapin' at one another, them an' the first officer, as if the end o' the world was come. By an' by, Lygon turns to me.

"Now you'll see, Mister," 'e says, "why I ought to 'ave turned the ship round in the Bristol Channel. Spragg's comin' 'ome with us from the Cape."

"Spragg, sir?" I asks. " 'Oo's 'e?"

"'E's the chairman of the Line," says Lygon.

"Well, sir," says I, "what's that against 'im?"

Lygon groans.

"Nothin'," 'e says. "Nothin' at all. It ain't Sir Timothy—'e's not a bad old cock—it's 'is wife."

By all appearances they'd 'ad some of the lady before, judgin' by their expressions. I got 'old of the first officer afterwards, an' 'e give me the office about this Lady Spragg. Seemin'ly, she was a caution.

"She's a ship chandler's daughter," says 'e, "an' you may or may not know what that means. There ain't a thing about a ship she don't know, or think she knows—and it's an' 'abit of 'ers to drag Sir Timothy up an' down the world, travelin' free, o' course, on the Line's boats, an' teachin' the ship's officers their job. An' lemme tell you," 'e says earnest, "you'll be sorry for the day you was born, Challis, by the time she's done with you, for she's a terror for young officers."

"Coo!" I says. "That bad, is it?"

"I'm seriously considerin' desertion at the Cape," says 'e. "One go of old Lady Spragg, which is all I've 'ad, is enough. Jonah's ditched us for fair this time!"

AT CAPE TOWN they come aboard, an' it didn't take more than a glimpse of 'em to see that the First was right. Jonah'd been a Jonah, no doubt about it.

Sir Timothy was a motheaten old gent with a white mustache an' a face like a sheep. 'E may 'ave been a big pot in the City, an' chairman o' the Line an' whatnot, but 'e certainly didn't look it. An' when one took a squint at 'is lady, one saw why 'e didn't look it. No one would.

She come up the ladder—Lygon had the ship's officers at the top to welcome 'is guests—an' the first thing I saw of 'er was a big round red face like a full moon risin' very ponderous an' slow. An' then there was a nose like a battleax an' a chin like a cruiser's ram, an' it was then I began to 'ave notions that there might be somethin' in this Jonah business after all.

She stood at the top o' the gangway, an' put up a pair o' spyglasses.

"Haw!" she says—just like that. "Haw! Captain Lygon, I presoom?"

Lygon salutes, very precise.

" 'Imself, me lady!" 'e says. "Welcome to the *Prince o' Wales*. I trust you'll enjoy your trip."

She looks round her and sniffs.

"There's a speck o' rust on that gratin'," she says. "An' that man there—" she points at McOstrich—" 'asn't washed 'is neck. Timothy," she turns on 'er 'usband, "I think we shall 'ave to make a new appointment to the command 'ere. This captain is careless, I fancy, an' disrespectful."

"I'll look into it, me love," says Sir Timothy, in a little tootle of a voice.

His wife glares at Lygon an' the rest o' us very 'orrid. Then she moves on, somethin' like a steamroller in petticoats.

"Show me to my cabin, please," she says. "In an hour Sir Timothy will inspect the ship—an' we'll then sail," says she.

Lygon touches his cap, 'is face very red.

"Beg pardon, me lady," says he. "I've not finished loadin'."

The woman blows up with a bang.

"Did you 'ear me, sir, or did you not?" she asks. "Timothy, this man's impertinent. Dismiss him."

"Yes, me love," says the old josser. "But 'e can't sail until 'e's ready . . ."

Lady Spragg glares worse than ever.

"Then why didn't 'e say so?" she asks. "The man's a fool."

An' with that she stalks off to the owner's cabin amidships, with old Sir Timothy trailin' after 'er as if 'e wished 'e was dead. Maybe 'e did.

Lygon looks at McOstrich, an' McOstrich looks at the rest of us.

"Gentlemen," says Lygon, "we're for it. I needn't 'int at the pleasant times that's in front of us all, partic'larly," 'e says, "as they'll be eatin at the same table with the rest of us, an' Me Lady," says 'e, "insists on all possible officers bein' present at meals. Clean, Mister McOstrich," 'e says. "In a boiled shirt, Mister McOstrich. D'ye get me?"

The chief said somethin' about the Jezebel o' Babylon, I fancy it was, but Lygon wasn't listenin' to 'im.

"Now," 'e says, "there's only one thing for it. We've all got to stick together. An' if there's any o' you 'as any ideas as to 'ow this very tryin' situation may be alleviated, let's 'ear 'em. An' that applies especially to you, Challis," 'e says to me. "You got us into this pretty mess—you get us out of it. Otherwise," 'e says, "I'll be under the painful necessity," says 'e, "of waitin' until this vessel's paid off, an' leatherin' you to a jelly—after I've finished with Jonah Jones."

"I'll remember," I says. "How'd it be if I made love to 'er?"

"Don't joke about solemn subjecks," 'e says. "More like, she'll make love to you. She likes kids."

An' 'e turns on 'is 'eel an' leaves me standin' there like a fool.

Well, I thinks to myself, it's no good pickin' on me over this business. Jonah Jones is the boy. An' while I'm thinkin' of what I'd like to do to that old nuisance, 'ere comes the steward to tell me Lady Spragg desires to see me in the main cabin.

She was sittin' there, more of a terror than ever, with old Sir Timothy away in a corner. She looks up at me as I come in.

"Mister Challis?" she says, with a smile that reminds me of a tomcat stalkin' sparrers. "You're the Fourth Officer, aren't you?"

I said I was.

"Sit down," she says. "You're very young to be holdin' a certificate. It's a great responsibility."

I said it was. She wasn't goin' to get any confidences out o' me.

"Don't you find, Mister Challis," she says, fixin' me with a gimlet of an eye, "that there are many temptations on shipboard for a young man?"

I said I did. There wasn't any tellin' where all this was drivin' to. But I soon found out.

"It's a shame," she says, "that mere boys like you 'ave to live an' work," she says, "in an atmosphere of wickedness an' immorality like there is, I've no doubt, on board 'ere. The captain's got a look in his eye I've seen before," she says. "He's a man of Belial, an' I 'ave just been deplorin' to Sir Timothy 'ere that there's no worthy person maintained on these vessels," she says, "to instruct young men like you in the way they should go. Ain't it so, Timothy?"

"Yes, me love," says 'e.

"An' what do you think about it, Mister Challis?" she asks.

"Yes'm," I says, that bein' all there was to say.

I was wonderin' whether she was goin' to ask me to take on the job or not, an' teach the apprentices 'ow to be'ave, when an idea hits me right between the eyes, an' before I knew where I was I'd started to follow it up.

"Ma'am," I says, "beggin' your pardon for interruptin', but there's an individual aboard at this minute that sizes up just to what you was sayin'."

"Go on," she says, very interested.

So I tells 'er all about Jonah Jones, for it looks to me, she bein' what she is, that the two of 'em'll get along together first rate, an'—'ere was the catch—that they'll maybe let the rest o' us alone. She listens for maybe five minutes on end; an' then she says—

"Bring 'im 'ere."

"Very good, me lady," says I, an' off with me, right away, to Lygon.

"Good 'eavens!" says 'e, shakin' me by the hand. "I do believe as 'ow you've 'it on a scheme, Challis. Never again will I say hard words about junior officers. Continue," says 'e, "an' me blessin' go with you!"

So I goes down into the focsle an' 'unts up Jonah. 'E's almighty short with me to begin with, o' course, for we'd not 'ad any dealin's for weeks; but at last I gets him up to the main cabin, lookin' more like a billygoat than ever.

She asks him 'oo 'e is at once, an' that sets 'im off. Inside a couple o' minutes 'e's tellin' 'er 'is story: 'ow 'e's Jonah, an' the way 'e's been treated, an' 'ow they won't throw him overboard, an' 'ow

trouble will come of it, an' so on an' so on. Lady Spragg looks at 'im, all eyes, for 'e's a reverend old cove when 'e's got 'is clothes on.

"Will you be requirin' me further, me lady?" I asks.

She shakes 'er 'ead, impatient-like, an' I 'ops it. I goes straight to Lygon.

"It's took — beautiful!" I says. "They're thick as thieves."

"Well, let's 'ope they stay like it," 'e says. "They're a pretty pair."

THAT evenin' we sails, an' soon after we 'as our first meal in the s'loon with our guests. It was a tryin' time for all, since she started in to ride Lygon about 'is ship in general, an' McOstrich about 'is engines (an' 'is neck) an' the rest of us about one thing an' another, an' me most especial about the way I'd treated old Jonah. By the time we'd finished we was all of us glad enough to get up topside an' smoke. I thought McOstrich would 'ave burst.

It was my watch at midnight, an' I turned in for a snooze about two bells or so; so I didn't 'ear the great an' 'appy noos. Callin' over the watch, Jonah didn't answer 'is name, an' they told me 'e was dossin' still in the focsle. I went down an' sure enough there 'e was in 'is bunk.

"Come on out o' that!" I says to 'im.

'E peers at me over the top of 'is blankets.

"Indeed an' I will do nothin' o' the kind," says 'e, very snappy. "It is the captain's orders, young man—an' captain's orders is to be obeyed, whatever!"

"Moses!" I says to meself. "What beano's broke loose now?" An' with that I runs up to the bridge. Lygon's there.

"Yes," 'e says to me very bitter, when I'd told 'im about Jonah. " 'E's off all dooty, Jonah is. Sir Timothy's orders. An' a nice 'oly mess you've been an' made o' things."

"Why?" I asks.

"You wait till tomorrow, young feller, an' you'll see," 'e says.

An' sure enough I saw. Next mornin' after breakfast the crew's mustered in the well, an' Lygon 'e makes 'em a speech. I've 'eard some funny things at sea, as I was sayin', but the like o' that I never listened to. She'd wrote it out for 'im 'erself, in 'er own 'and—an' put it up to 'im whether 'e'd like to spill it to the 'ands as ordered, or be sacked at Port Elizabeth. Naturally 'e chose to spill it.

I won't 'ang fire over the details, but it was all about what a wicked lot o' perishers we all was, an' 'ow the time 'ad come for us to be taken in 'and—an' 'ow there was a chap amongst us, by a queer chanst, that was specially geared to do it, an' 'ow by the kindness of the chairman's lady ('e choked over that one!) we was to be treated to instruction an' exhortation daily by this chap; an' in conclusion 'e calls upon our shipmate Ebenezer Jones to come forward an' commence.

An' Ebenezer Jones did. He comes out o' the chartroom, where 'e'd been waitin' like a parson in church, an' forward with 'im to the rail. 'E was in 'is blacks an' that amazin' 'at of his, an' a white tie; 'e was perfeckly quiet to begin with, although there was a glitter in his old eye that I didn't much like. An' 'e started in from the rail in English, very much repeatin' what 'er Ladyship 'ad already informed us through Lygon—that we was a shockin' set o' bleeders an' that the sooner we improved the better—or words to that effect.

By an' by he began to get excited an' drop into Welsh 'ere an' there. Then 'e'd start in to wave 'is arms an' shout; an' in about ten minutes 'e was carryin' on in pure Welsh, that nobody understood a word of, an' simply foamin' at the mouth over it. It was wicked.

That old buzzard went on for an hour an' ten minutes by the chartroom clock before 'e run down; an' 'e only stopped then because 'e was so 'oarse 'e couldn't say another word. Lady Spragg turns to Lygon.

"There you are, Captain," she says. "Mister Jones will address the ship's company every mornin' at two bells sharp.

An' we'll 'ave no shirkin', please."

There wasn't anything to do about it. Strictly speakin', I suppose, Lygon could 'ave refused, bein' master; but the way it was put to him an' the rest of us was that we was a poor lot, anyhow, an' wanted dischargin' at a minute's notice, the best of us, but that judgment would be suspended until we got home—provided we done as we was told now.

So it went on for pretty near two weeks, while the *Prince o' Wales* crawled up the coast—Jonah bein' struck off all dooties (an' I should say 'e was eatin' in the s'loon) an' exhortin' regular every mornin', mainly in Welsh, an' Lady Spragg 'avin' the time of her wicked old life seein' him do it, an' us sufferin'.

Lygon an' the rest of us was wonderin' whether we'd be able to last out till we saw London River without committin' murder or suicide or both; an' as for McOstrich, 'e was visibly pinin' away from internal combustion, when one mornin' it 'appened.

The *Prince o' Wales* was standin' in for Beira, where she'd a load of tin to take on. We was thirty or forty mile out, in a goodish lop of a swell an' great heat. As per usual we'd engines stopped at two bells for old Jonah to give us his performance, an' all 'ands was mustered in the well, quite regular, with the officers an' Sir Timothy on the bridge, Lady Spragg sittin' in a deck chair out at the end of one wing of it, so that she could see if anybody was goin' to sleep or not pretendin' to pay attention.

Just in the middle of Jonah's fireworks, the Third, 'oo was standin' next to me, nudges me in the ribs.

"Look over on the beam," 'e whispers. "Ain't those whales?"

Sure enough, they was—three or four of 'em, spoutin' as gay as you please. Comin' towards us, too, by the look of it. An' right then I 'ad what you might, in a manner o' speakin,' call a premonition.

"Jonah's friends comin' for him at last," whispers the Third, loud, stabbin' me in the short ribs with a thumb like a bowsprit.

JONAH 'ears 'im, an' turns round with a scowl at the interruption. An' then the scowl fades straight off 'is old face, an' 'e looks out beyond us to where the big fellows are throwin' up fountains of water an' mist, the way they do. An' 'e stops dead, like 'e's thunderstruck. An' in about a blink, every one's lookin', first at the whales, an' then at Jonah on the bridge.

Ever since this exhortin' business 'ad started, 'e'd been mighty quiet about Jonah. Seemed as if one thing 'ad took his mind off the other. But now these chaps comin' visitin' him, as you might say, put it all back into 'is 'ead again. While we're watchin' 'im, 'e runs his hand up to his collar.

"No—no!" sings out Lygon, and then shuts up sudden, with a kind of grin on his face.

Jonah chucks his collar away an' takes off 'is coat. One or two of the 'ands down below giggles, an' Lady Spragg gets up from her chair in a 'urry.

"What's the meaning of this?" she asks, agitated. "Stop that!"

Jonah takes off 'is boots an' begins to tackle 'is pants. In a minute 'e's standin' there in 'is shirt tails—an' Lady Spragg makes a dive at him.

Well, just what 'appened then is 'ard to say. They was both out on the wing of the bridge, an' there was quite a deal of a swell runnin', as I said. But the old boy chucks off 'is shirt, yellin' "Jonah, Jonah!" at the top of 'is voice; the woman misses 'er dive for 'im, runs straight smack into the rail; there's a 'eave o' the ship, an' another yell from Jonah as 'e's standin' on the top bar against the sky. An' the next noos is they're both in the water. I 'eard old Sir Timothy be'ind me say somethin' that showed 'e wasn't quite such a mealy mouthed old soft as 'e let on to be.

Lygon comes to 'imself first.

"Boats away!" 'e trumpets between 'is 'ands.

Everybody jumps to it, an' in a couple o' shakes we'd three boats in the water,

lookin' sharp for the pair of 'em.

I was in the bows of one of 'em, an' for a few minutes we couldn't see anything. Then a feller by me grunts, an' 'ere the two come, ridin' down the slope of a wave. The woman's got 'old of Jonah good an' tight, an' by the look of it he ain't a bit pleased, neither. I leant over an' grabbed 'im, or rather got a handful of each of 'em.

"Let me go!" he chokes. "Let me go, young man! *Dam-o-dee*, then, will you let me go! Jonah I am an' to the whale I must go!"

"Shut up, you silly old fathead," I says, "or I'll crown you!"

An' with that I dragged him into the boat, while the others hauled the woman over the side. She was full o' water an' unconscious.

We pulled back to the ship, Jonah ravin' an' cursin' in Welsh like a cat in the measles, an' got 'em on board. Old Sir Timothy was fussin' over his wife somethin' chronic, an' it wasn't very long, so I 'eard, before she come to. An' then the old boy comes out of the cabin, an' sends for Jonah, that's wrapped up in a coat now, shiverin' an' swearin' turn about, an' blasphemin' every one on board an' me most special. 'E gets up an' walks across to Sir Timothy, an' you never saw such an old scarecrow in all your born days.

"Me man," says the old boy, "'ow can I thank you?"

Jonah sticks out 'is chest at that an' starts in to brag a bit.

"Indeed, an' it was nothin'," says 'e. "Nothin' at all. I am glad to 'ave been of use in savin' the good lady's life, look you."

Sir Timothy looks at him very odd indeed, an' there's a twinkle in 'is eye I've not seen before.

"You don't quite understand, me men," 'e says. "It's not so much that you saved 'er life—although I'm profoundly grateful for that as well—but Lady Spragg 'as—er—decided, in consequence of her immersion, to give up travelin'. In fact, gentlemen—" 'e turns to Lygon an' the rest of us—"she's 'ad a damn good scare, an' she's the better for it. An' I owe this man 'ere a great deal."

You never saw such a change in a feller. 'E looks at us sideways through 'is old glasses, an' I begun to see some'ow why 'e was chairman o' the Line. Then 'e turns to Lygon again.

"Will you be good enough," 'e says, "to ask Mr. McOstrich to slap on every knot 'e can screw out o' 'er. I want to get to Beira," 'e says, "an' I'm goin' 'ome by liner from there. An' if ever I go to sea again, gentlemen," says 'e, "may I be jiggered!"

"An' Lady Spragg will be goin' with you in the liner?" Jonah asks suddenly.

"She will," says the old man.

"An' there will be no more exhortations?"

"No," says Lygon, very sudden, "there will not. I'll see to that."

Jonah looks as if some one's kicked 'im in the stommick. Sir Timothy notices it.

"Now, what am I goin' to do for you?" 'e says. "I believe you've put twenty years on me life."

Jonah Jones looks round at all of us, that's ready to bust out cheerin' at the notion of 'avin' no Lady Spragg an' no exhortations for the future. Then 'e says—

"I will ask my reward from Lady Spragg 'erself!"

An' with that 'e starts in to walk over to the cabin, 'e bein' dressed in a short pea jacket an' nothin' else.

Lygon stops him.

"Go below an' get some clothes on, Jones," 'e says. "An' then no doubt Lady Spragg will see you. Meanwhile, sir," 'e says to Sir Timothy, "I've a bottle in my cabin you might like to see."

Sir Timothy's eyes twinkle again.

"Lead on, Skipper," says 'e. "I've not took a snort since we left London—but things is goin' to be different now. Lead on!"

Well, it wasn't much more than three hour's steam to Beira, an' Lady Spragg was still too upset to see Jonah when we dropped anchor. So it was understood that 'e an' Lygon should go ashore that

afternoon an' interview 'er at the 'otel.

"An' you can trust me," says Lygon, "to get 'im sent home by the mail," 'e says. "We've seen the last o' 'im."

An' at that 'e stands us drinks all round. I went down to find Jonah. 'E was sittin' in the focsle, very thoughtful.

"Well, grandpa," I says, "no more sea doin's for you. You're in clover."

"She will give me what I am askin', think you, young man?" 'e says concerned-like.

"If she doesn't, Sir Timothy will."

'E gets up an' starts puttin' on 'is clothes. "I will be content with that, whatever," 'e says, an' for the first time, an' the last, I see 'im grin.

Lygon an' 'e goes ashore, an' there's the whole ship's company linin' the rail to see 'im off. You never 'eard such cheerin' in your life. McOstrich is standin' on the bridge with me, an' 'e's tight as a lord an' smeared with grease from head to foot.

"Laddie," 'e says, pretty near weepin', "we owe it all to you. Man, you're a genius!"

He pulls a bottle out o' his pocket an' takes a swig.

"An' 'ere's the verra guid 'ealth," 'e says, "of Lady Spragg, an' may she give Jonah what 'e deserves . . ."

Challis paused in his maddening manner at the end of a story. "Well?" I asked impatiently. "Is that all?"

He laughed.

"No," he said. "It isn't. Twenty minutes later McOstrich peers at the shore.

" 'Losh!' 'e says, ' 'ere's the boat comin' back."

"It was. An' Lygon was in the stern sheets, an' sittin' by 'im, with 'is arms folded like a bloomin' admiral, was Jonah.

"No one said a word until they was on board. Then McOstrich catches Lygon by the arm.

" 'What noo?' " 'e says, agitated.

"Lygon turns round to 'im an' me with a face like a nine-days' corpse—all white and pasty-like.

" 'She sold us after all,' 'e croaks. 'Jonah asked for a rovin' commission, exhortin' the ships o' this Line—an' she give it to 'im. An'—'e's sailin' with us first!' "

MACHINE GUN MORALE

By CHARLES L. CLIFFORD

CAPTAIN CRANE watched his first sergeant answer the orderly room phone. He could tell by the voice, rather than any change in the leathery face, that it was the colonel again. And that it was the same story. He got up and walked slowly to take the receiver from the old man's hand.

Outright rebellion at this petty persecution was boiling in him. Almost every other day now that harsh, distant voice rasped at him across thirty miles of desert. And always about the same thing. How could he help it if Leardo Gonzales offered machine gun men twenty dollars gold a day? And Uncle Sam begrudged one? And Leardo threw in the excitement of battle and honest liquor for good measure. All he himself had to offer was merciless and unsuccessful night patrolling and an arid, desolate tent camp. There was no town near that camp; the closest was Bravos, across the Line. And Bravos, being the stronghold of the revolutionary Gonzales, was forbidden. Sometimes, bored and lonely, he almost wished that he were an enlisted man so that he, too, could take his arms and equipment and once again be with fighting men.

As he called coolly into the instrument, the colonel's wrath exploded.

"Crane, I'm fed up on this! Seven men in the last month, and now Delaney's gone."

"I'm sorry, sir. I—"

"To hell with being sorry. Do you realize that Delaney was my orderly in France? That he's never been absent a day in his life? What kind of an outfit are you running that drives men over the hill at such a rate?"

Captain Crane tried to explain that he was carrying out the standing orders of the district. That he was patrolling every mile of Border trail along the International Line; that he thought he was doing the job very well.

"Damn that!" the colonel barked back. "Your first concern is with the morale of your troop. And this talk of arms smuggling is just so much rot. You haven't taken any, have you?"

"No, sir. Not yet."

"Not yet!" the colonel mocked. "And you never will. District's always full of tripe like that. Got these intelligence slackers fattening in chairs up here with nothing to do but think up excuses for their jobs."

"Yes, sir."

"And another thing—reports have come to me that you're fraternizing with that murderer, Gonzales."

"He's a very fine officer and a gentleman, sir."

This was too much. Leardo had always been damned decent. What could that old war horse, thirty miles away, know of the friendship that had ripened between them in this desolate country? Let him rave.

He did rave. He said ferociously—

"You keep out of Bravos, do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"No wonder that bandit is stealing your men right under your nose. Damn it! The next one that joins up with them is going to mean a set of charges for you. Understand that?"

"Yes, sir," Crane said in a steady voice.

"Now get this," the colonel said carefully. "You put your troop at useful work. Cut out that melodrama, chasing will-o'-the-wisps over the hills at night. A good morning's drill and a sleep in the afternoon, and their bellyfull of chow—then you can't drive soldiers away. I ought to know. Had a troop for fifteen years without a single desertion."

This military recipe exhausted the colonel and he hung up with a bang.

Captain Crane walked moodily to his chair by the desk and lighted his pipe in silence. He was aware of the sympathetic look of the old top, who pretended great attention to his monthly roster.

"No patrols tonight," Crane said, "and no more intelligence men will go over to Bravos. No drill tomorrow. And send word over to Colonel Gonzales that duty keeps me from dinner with him tonight."

"Very good, sir," the first sergeant said quietly.

"And now," Captain Crane said, rising and stretching elaborately, "I'm going to fill my belly with chow and sleep twelve hours."

With that he walked out of the room and up the hill to the little sheepherder's shack he called home.

The luminous dial of his wrist watch showed three of the morning when Crane was awakened. At first he thought only of the roar of the wind and rain tearing at the rickety building. He sat up in his cot and marveled at the sudden storm so unusual and unexpected in this parched country. Then he was aware of lights, loud knocking at the shaky door, and the call of voices.

Dripping and windswept, his first sergeant entered at his command. With him was Gomez, the little private who had been assigned to intelligence duty in Bravos. Gomez had been born in New Mexico but all the attributes of his people below the Line were his. Even the tongue of his motherland he spoke with irreproachable accent. It had been his job to pick up what he could on the other side. And with the comradeship existing between Crane's men and those of the genial Gonzales, this had been an easy and pleasant assignment for young Gomez. Though Gomez had always taken care to wander across in the garb of a peon who belonged.

NOW he had a wild tale to tell. After months of dregs, he brought the brimming cup. Authentic news had come to Gonzales' camp that the fabian Federalistas were at last on the move

north. Consignments of arms and ammunition for Gonzales, long expected from the States, were due. And this very night would be rushed across the Line. Somewhere near Bravos. Trucked up from San Diego, he had heard. Then mule packed across the barren hills east of the town. A bold move but necessary, his informant had unwittingly let drop. On such a night the good natured gringo soldiers would be off guard. No harm meant to them, of course. But things were desperate. The convoy was large and well armed. If stopped, they would have to fight their way through. A picked body of Gonzales' cavalry had cut the wire already and would see the loads across.

Crane was dazed by the news. Forgotten was the colonel and all his works and pomps. A brazen rush of arms was about to be attempted across the very Line he was under orders to guard. And no patrols were out. Even now it might be too late.

He questioned the little private closely. The man had been in the troop five years now and his loyalty was certain. He had picked up the information from soldiers preparing even then to march out as guard for the convoy. They had actually offered to take him along. The exact spot of the intended crossing they had not themselves known. Only Gonzales knew that.

Crane gave swift orders to his first sergeant. Then hurriedly dressing and grabbing up his glasses and pistol belt, he raced to the orderly room. A feeling of exultation sped him down the slippery hill. He'd tell that old war horse something now! The colonel would call off the patrols, would he? And laugh at intelligence work?

But the wires gave back no sign of singing life. The phone was dead. The storm had attended to that.

Lights flashed in the tents. Voices echoed on the picket line. The horses whinnied toward the running troopers. The White motor ambulance and the Dodge official car drew up before the orderly room door. Crane took personal charge of their loading. In his own car he put a couple of machine riflemen and young Gomez. In the ambulance more machine rifles and rifle squads. It was thirteen miles to Bravos. And it would take the troop, by marching, at least two and a half hours over the dark mountain roads. The stuff might be across by then . . .

A small guard was to be left to protect the camp. Except for those men going by motor the troop, with their led horses, was to proceed under the first sergeant by marching.

Ten minutes after the news had arrived in camp, Captain Crane was bouncing in the sturdy little Dodge over the mountain road that led to San Diego via Bravos. Proudly Gomez sat beside him in the driver's seat. The motor transport man assigned to drive the car had been left behind in the interest of economy of space.

Above the rush of the wind and rain Crane and the little Mexican talked. Gomez felt certain that Gonzales knew of the withdrawal of the American patrols. That the coincidence of this important shipment of arms arriving at such a time and when most needed would prove too much temptation for his violent and direct temperament. Yes, they'd run them in boldly, directly through the main trail that led from the San Diego road. A mere two miles straight through into Bravos, which lay flush against the fence.

Crane's jaw tightened as he listened. In case Gomez was right in his surmise, there would be trouble. The prospect of a fight, generally speaking, had never been unpleasant to Captain Crane. He was used to saying, a little wistfully, that it was a long time between wars these days. For a year now he had patrolled a thirty-mile strip of Border and nothing exciting had happened. The Mexican military who controlled the state south of the Line had been extremely friendly. At first he had been suspicious of their overtures. He suspected their offers of friendship were mere tricks to make him

relax his vigilance. They were continually in need of munitions to further their expeditions, which sporadically sallied into the interior on counter raiding missions. Undoubtedly some were getting across in spite of his vigilance. You couldn't cover every foot of mountain trail for thirty miles with one lone troop of cavalry.

Leardo Gonzales, who commanded the garrison of Bravos and all the territory south of his own sector, had been especially friendly. Hardly had Crane taken over the district than Leardo made his desire for amicable relations known by sending a spruce young captain to call and invite the American captain to dine with himself and the officers of his command. Crane thought it his duty to accept. When he presented himself at the gate of the Port of Bravos he was pleasantly surprised. Leardo and his staff met him with grave formality. Instead of the ragged ruffians he had been led to expect, he shook hands with smart, beautifully turned out young men who would have done credit to a British Guards regiment had they been six inches taller.

Later, Crane understood. General Bonilla, then in control of the state, had farsightedly gathered about him officers of the old régime. Graduates of the Mexican military academy. He was wise enough to pay them regularly and well. This was made possible by the millions pouring in from the gambling towns of the state that lay along the International Line and tempted tourists from all over the world.

Bonilla insisted that he was the rightful governor of this Mexican state. That he had been legally installed by the last properly constituted Federal government. That subsequent revolutionary presidents had no authority to oust him and seize his rich pickings, which they were continually threatening to do. Once again a new *de facto* government was shaking the mailed fist under Bonilla's jaw. And Bonilla, as usual, was having none of it. And the people of the state, who knew the worst of Bonilla, preferred him to a succession of less attractive grafters. At least they had been free of the bloodshed that had characterized the rest of Mexico for the past ten years. Unfortunately, the United States had at last recognized the present Federal government, and forbade the shipment of munitions of war into Bonilla territory—just at the time that Bonilla was faced with the first formidable invasion since he had taken office.

The natural result of the benign tyrant's reign was that Americans along the Line, for the first time, felt safe in Mexico. They went across and drank and gambled and were treated as welcome guests. They made friends. They ended by swearing by Bonilla. And they knew that the coming of another governor would start the same old raiding and bloodshed along that part of the Border that had known nothing but peace for ten years.

OF COURSE, Crane had these same feelings. His relations with Leardo had been extremely pleasant. They even joked of the arms embargo. They were friendly enemies. To them the whole thing was a mere matter of an amicable checker game.

Leardo would say with his friendly grin:

"You ought to give those boys of yours a rest. I'm not running a thing in this week, I promise you."

Crane would laugh.

"Word of honor?"

"Well—"

Then they would both roar.

"Just a few cases of machine gun stuff."

"I'll bet you I pick it up."

"Taken! Two quarts of Monopole. Are you on?"

They would shake hands. And a week later Leardo would send word. He would point with pride to a heap of neat wooden cases.

"There they are. Last Wednesday—"

Crane would be chagrined, but he'd buy the champagne.

"Next time—"

"Next time—"

And now he was racing toward Leardo's town with full belts. Leardo's friendly, grinning *soldados*, and perhaps the young Captain Vivavicencio, would be torn by the contents of those belts. All over nothing. They liked each other; but when the first shot rang out in the dark mountains, duty as each saw it came first. And if Leardo succeeded and he failed, in one way he would be happier. His friends would have the means for defending themselves against that horde, even now marching north. But his own duty was at stake. He had been chagrined for the last time. For the last time outwitted by the grinning Leardo. This time it would be Leardo who would buy champagne. The last bottle, probably, he would ever buy.

The car lurched on, thrashing through the muddy pools that lay on the winding road. From the top of a rise the lights of Bravos showed dimly through the rain haze. Soon they would come to the side road that led to the left and into Bravos. Beyond that were two rocky trails, also leading from the main road. These ended abruptly at the high wire fence that divided the United States from Mexico. They lay perhaps a mile apart and possibly three miles beyond the road to the Mexican town. But on such a night . . . Would the convoy, secure in the knowledge that the American patrols were not on guard, make the bold play of driving right up to the main gate? Or would they, cautious of trickery, use the lower, more difficult way?

Crane ordered Gomez to drive on by the main side road that led to Bravos. At the first trail below he dropped off a machine rifleman and a small guard of riflemen. He repeated this at the next trail. The men were ordered to stop any movement of troops or vehicles through the trails. With the balance of his men he took position on a barren piece of high ground that overlooked Bravos and which was centrally located in regard to the three trails leading toward the fence. From here he could support any of the threatened patrols with the main body of the troop. The cars he left behind the single building on the American side, a dilapidated general store, now dark and closely shuttered.

The little group on the hill sheltered themselves against the rain as best they could, crouching in the lee of an outcropping of rock. Crane pulled his slicker about him and stared gloomily down at the scattered lights of the Mexican town. Flat topped adobe huts, for the most part, made up the pueblo. The *cuartel*, or barracks, the one hotel, and a public building or two were the only edifices of more than one story. Beyond the town, to the south, Crane knew that deep, well wired trenches cunningly covered the open, sloping ground. He knew to the yard just where those trenches lay. Where the machine gun emplacements were that covered the approaches; how the very guns were laid to bring their bands of fire along the final defensive line. Well he knew all this, because personally he had taped out those trenches, sited those guns, directed the installation of that ragged wire . . .

What would the old war horse say if he knew that! He chuckled there in the dark as he thought of it.

He jumped up as he heard the sharp call of the sentry he had posted on the road below, the creaking of saddle leather. The troop had arrived. The first sergeant, Mullins, dismounted and saluted. Crane directed that one platoon move out at once to cover the two lower passes. They took with them the led horses of the dismounted patrols already in position. The rest of the troop he ordered into a shallow arroyo just back of the hill, had them dismount and await developments.

Now he was prepared for whatever might betide. He had the bulk of his command well in hand in a central position. His mounted patrols along the main road and farther in along the fence would give him timely warning of any truck or mule movement. Damned little would get by those lads in their present mood. Dragged out of their tents on a night

like this just because a few lousy spicks thought they'd pull a shenanigan!

But the night passed without incident. Not a sign of movement even in the town. Another false alarm, probably. All Crane hoped was that the colonel never heard of this new folly.

The light of the new day struggled wanly through the racing, heavy clouds that hung low over the mountains. The troopers, cold, wet, tightened their web belts over their flat stomachs. Against a windbreak of ragged rock, deep back in the arroyo, the smoke of the field range circled in ragged wisps. The sweet odor of coffee wafted upward. The bedraggled, stiff muscled men twisted restlessly in the dripping mesquite bushes. They craned their heads so as to look toward the improvised kitchen. They growled and mumbled to each other, outraged. They wanted to be sure that every one understood just how childish this sort of business was to tough, hard fighting field soldiers . . .

CRANE saw Leardo Gonzales. He was walking briskly toward the gate just in front of the general store. Two officers, in sober gray, their black ponchos dripping against their heels, followed Leardo. Leardo stood by the fence and leaned over the wooden gate. The man, Brady, who owned the weatherbeaten store, paused in the business of opening his shutters against the morning trade. He stared down toward the fence. Leardo called to him, and he pointed back toward where the troops were lying under the cover of the mesquite bushes.

"The damned fool," Crane muttered.

He snapped his glasses back into their wet leather case and walked down the hill. Leardo saw him and waved.

"You're up early," Leardo said. "What's all the excitement?"

"You ought to know," Crane said.

He walked up to the gate and looked at Leardo. The two younger Mexicans with the *commandante* saluted him and bowed gravely.

"Well, Leardo?"

"Well, what?"

"Listen, Captain—you're all wrong this time. Nothing's coming over."

"Did I say there was?"

Leardo waved his hand so that it described a generous arc.

"You got men all around over there. You haven't started a war with us, have you?"

Leardo laughed as though he thought this were an amusing idea.

"You don't want me to get tried, do you?"

"Tried?" Leardo said.

"Yes. Before a court-martial."

"Oh—why do you say that?"

"Colonel Bowman gave me hell over the phone yesterday. His old orderly came over here a couple of days ago. I want him back, Leardo."

"He's just like anybody else," Leardo said.

One of the young officers handed the other a cigaret. They each lighted up and looked vaguely toward the low hills back of the ugly store.

"Delaney was the Old Man's orderly in France. He can't do wrong."

"So *you* did wrong in letting him come. Now I get blamed, eh?"

"I want him back," Crane said.

"I've been paying him good wages—gold," Leardo said. "He's got to put out something."

"The next one that goes over to you I get relieved—and tried."

"That's tough," Leardo said. "I wouldn't like some other wise guy over there. You and I get along fine. Only thing the matter with you, Captain, you get a lot of crazy ideas."

"Crazy ideas?"

Leardo's voice was aggrieved. Again he waved his hand, indicating, apparently, the whole United States.

"Yes. You've got your men all around—back there on the trails and road. Patrols."

Crane looked quickly at Leardo. The other two Mexicans looked vaguely off at the hills.

"How do you know that?"

Leardo said quickly:

"Oh—couple of *vaqueros* riding for the Campos Cattle Company told some of my men. They came in over the lower trail. Scared, seeing all those sabers and things . . ."

"Then they better keep off those trails."

Crane pointed into the town of Bravos, just across the gate. Thin columns of men, the water dripping from their high, wide hats, tramped by. They moved south through the adobe shacks, shuffling out of the town. The rifles, massed above them, were black in the rain.

"How about those—rifles and things? You seem to be sending men where you want—on your side of the Line."

"That's different," Leardo said. His black eyes gleamed as he watched the columns marching. "You're not at war over there."

"We have to train for it, though," Crane said. "My men are having a field problem."

Leardo's eyes lighted. There was a lilt of eagerness in his voice. He said:

"Ah, then here's their chance to see the real thing. A battle before their eyes. My invited guests for the big show."

"How?" Crane said.

"Get them all together. Up there under cover, back of the hill there. Torres landed at Ensenada yesterday. My patrols are in touch now just below here. We'll have a big *fiesta* at the fence afterward."

Crane considered this. After all, his men had had little fun that night. To march them back at the sound of battle . . . How they would love to sit in a grandstand seat and watch it! But those arms? It would be just like the wily Gonzales to try to toll his men away from the path of the arms convoy. All he had to do was phone back and hold them in some sheltered spot along the deserted road until the coast was clear. Then in the excitement of the battle, rush them across.

CRANE looked closely at Leardo. He appeared to be watching men who were barricading the streets at his back. The two young officers were looking through the haze of their cigaret smoke as if through veiled eyes.

"Your phones working over there, Leardo?"

"That's a funny question," Leardo said. He laughed.

"Mine went down in the storm," Crane said.

"Oh, sure—I remember now. Yes, ours are out."

Somehow, Crane didn't believe that.

"Listen, Captain," Leardo said, "you can have that orderly back. I don't want to get you in any trouble. You can come over yourself and get him. That'll put the fear of God into him. I want you to take a look at my disposition, anyway."

This was real temptation. It was flattery. It would be great to help set the stage for a real battle again. Give orders to men who in a few minutes, perhaps, would be pumping hot lead into an enemy.

And it would please the Old Man if he brought Delaney back. Crane looked Leardo squarely in the eyes.

"Come clean, now, Leardo. I'll take my men off and let them watch the fun."

"Fine," Leardo said hastily.

"Under one condition."

Leardo laughed loudly.

"Here you go again," he said.

"Your word of honor that nothing's being run in."

Leardo continued to laugh. The two young officers moved away, their eyes staring back toward the trench lines.

"Here comes a bird looking for you," Leardo said.

A trooper galloped up. He was highly conscious of the sharp reining up of his mount. He felt important reporting to his captain in front of the Mexican officers. He saluted, holding the bight of his wet reins with his left arm.

"Colonel Bowman's coming, sir."

"Good Lord," Crane said.

"There's his car," Leardo said. "They say he's a tough *hombre*. Never met him, myself."

Crane turned and saw the drab Cadillac official car, lurching over the rough, muddy road. It stopped in front of the store. There was an officer in it and a soldier driver. A thickset, erect, white haired man got out. They could hear him cursing. He stalked to the fence. Crane saluted. The Mexicans drew themselves up. They saluted, magnificently.

"'*S dias, Coronel!*"

"What the hell's this?" the colonel said. "I took those idiots of yours off as I came up the road," he said to Crane. His jaw was working furiously. Short, bristly white hairs stuck crazily from his red jowls. "What do you mean by this nonsense, sir?"

Crane tried to explain. The Old Man shut him up with a fierce jerk of his arm.

"Who's that saddle colored so-and-so?" he said, pointing to Leardo.

"That's Colonel Gonzales, sir: commanding officer—"

"Commanding hell! He's a murderer —a bandit—" He choked on his own words.

Leardo bowed low.

"At your service, señor," he said politely. In his black eyes a wicked gleam grew.

The colonel turned his cold blue eyes from the Mexican to Crane.

"I told the east patrol to get word in to you if they could locate a phone that was working," Crane said. "May I—I'd like to speak to you in private—"

"You'll get enough of that later," the Old Man stormed. "While I'm here I want to say in front of this so-called colonel, or whatever he is—"

Leardo bowed.

"Colonel, señor. Colonel in the army of his Excellency, General Manuel Bonilla y Valencia."

"—that our Department of Justice has furnished me a complete report on him. He murdered a policeman in Los Angeles. There's a price of five thousand dollars on his head."

Leardo bowed.

"On your side of the fence, only, *mi Coronel*. It is twenty thousand pesos in Mexico City."

"You're a damned murdering scoundrel," the colonel snorted.

"The police gentleman made the mistake of describing me as you did a moment ago, *mi Coronel*—also of striking me, as you seem inclined to do. We don't call that murder in Mexico."

"By the Lord," the colonel raved, "you'll laugh on the other side of your face when the Federals get up here. And I warn you now that when you come across to be interned, you'll find a couple of detectives from Los Angeles standing by. I came up here just to make arrangements by the district commander's orders. You people haven't a chance. I'm returning at once and that'll be my report."

Leardo drew the young Mexican officers aside and spoke softly to them. They hurried away in the direction of the town. Then Leardo turned and grinned wickedly at Colonel Bowman.

"In that case, señor, there will be no internment."

"Oh, I know those peons of yours. At the first shot, up goes the white flag and they all sign up with the enemy. You'll come across all right and take a chance when you see that 'dobe wall staring you in the face."

A FAINT sound of firing came to them. The colonel raised his head like a war charger, lifting his chin, cocking his head.

"Ah—" Leardo said softly. He bowed low to Bowman, then saluted punctiliously.

"I have an engagement, señores," he said, and he held out his hand over the wet gate to Crane. The captain shook it.

"Good luck, Colonel."

They stood and watched him walk briskly away in the rain toward the sound of firing.

"The damned fool!" the colonel said.

But his tone had lost its ugliness. "Now, sir!"

Crane explained sheepishly. The colonel kicked at the wet 'dobe mud and cursed under his breath. But he said nothing until his captain had finished. Then he broke out.

"I ordered you only yesterday to quit that foolishness. Some of your men are probably even now crawling through the fence to get into that mess. You're asking them to do it with your own example of insubordination. I told you that the next man to go over would mean a court for you. You'd better check them. I've ordered them all back here with your so-called support."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm going back to headquarters and send some trucks up here. You'll need wire and blankets and rations. When they come across disarm them. Herd them in a stockade and phone me."

"But, Colonel, they've a good outfit over there. Plenty of machine guns—"

The colonel looked at him sharply.

"How do you know?"

A sudden wild desire came to Crane to yell:

"I know because I've inspected those troops as a guest of honor. Because I emplaced and sited those guns myself!" But he said quietly—

"I've seen a good deal that went on over there, on patrols and so forth."

The Old Man grunted. He started walking stiffly toward his car.

"Well, I'll be surprised if you haven't lost half your troop after the useless running around you gave them last night. Get them together and away from the line of fire over there. Get some decent chow into them. I'm going back now."

Crane walked to the car with the colonel. Unfair as the Old Man seemed to him, he had a sneaking liking and respect for him. Some of the tales told about his younger days were hair raising. And while he commanded a brigade in France, twice he was wounded in front line trenches.

But as he saw the colonel preparing to move off in the car the stubbornness that was inherent in him refused to be downed. And deep under it was a foreboding.

"Colonel, what about that information I got about the Mexican convoy? They'll need stuff badly now. Maybe the sight of my patrols kept them back under cover. They might try it now that the roads are unguarded."

Colonel Bowman was tucking his long, booted legs into the car. He froze in his seat. He glared.

"What's that!" he yelled. "Damn it, I've a good mind to put you in arrest and take you back with me. Haven't I told you that all that stuff is pure bunk? Do you think you know more about these spicks than I do? By the Lord, sir, you get up there and call the roll of your men, and cut out this damned wild goose chasing."

"Very good, sir."

"And remember," the colonel yelled back as the car started, "the next American soldier to cross there and a set of charges for you."

Crane saluted.

"Yes, sir."

The car drove off, sending up a volley of greasy mud. Crane stared after it a minute, then burst out into a loud laugh.

"There he goes," he said. "No breakfast—sore as a boil."

He walked slowly up the hill and saw the troop assembling under the direction of the first sergeant. He noticed that they were well under cover, though no bullets were coming over as yet. The firing had increased below Bravos. He drew out his glasses and lay behind a rock, his elbows propped, staring.

In the massed mesquite south of the town, he could pick up, here and there, groups of the attackers. They moved forward, bending low, dragging machine guns. A faint haze hung against the edge of the brush as the attacking rifles came into play. From the trenches outside the town the defenders fired steadily. Against the encircling hills the concert of rifles sounded like the stolid beating of a huge, wet carpet. And sharply, defi-

nitely etched against the duller sound, was the quick eruption of the machine guns. Like giant, distant, hungry woodpeckers, thumping on stubborn wood . . .

The first sergeant came up to report. With battle in his blood, Crane almost wished the man would say there were absentees. Then he could walk down that hill, say to the devil with cranky colonels who had been pulled out of bed without their breakfasts . . .

"All present, sir."

The soldier stood, watching his young captain. In his old, leathery brown face, the lines had tightened. A dull gleam had come into his blue eyes. He looked down toward the moving haze, then back at his officer.

"Haney seen mounted spicks down the San Diego road, sir," he said.

Crane turned over on his side. He looked up.

"What's that!"

"Yes, sir. Armed men. Some of Gonzales', he thinks."

"When?"

"Jest after the colonel druv him an' his patrol in, sir."

"Why in hell didn't he report to me at once?"

"Jest got in, sir. Trucks behind them all right, too, sir."

Crane groaned.

"Hell," he said.

The old man looked stolidly across the Line.

"Purty good scrap comin' up, I guess. Men wants to know can they take a look."

"Where were they coming in?" Crane asked.

"Lower trail, sir. Trucks can make it. Jest cut the wire an' there you are."

"There I am," Crane said.

"Well, it was the colonel's orders. No skin off our— Beg pardon, sir."

"It's all right with me," Crane said. "And as you were about to say, Sergeant, when I so rudely interrupted, it's no skin off our hide. Let 'em have the stuff, and more power to them."

"That's what the troop says, sir. They're all pullin' for Gonzales. Anythin' in this rumor 'bout him puttin' out free beer after the scrap, sir?"

"Now I ask you—none of them could have heard that."

"One them rumors I guess," the first sergeant said sadly. "Wouldn't it be comical, Captain, if the colonel runned smack into that convoy? Bet his eyes would bug out."

Captain Crane sat up. He began to laugh, loudly and without dignity.

"I'd give my next month's pay," he said softly, "a year's pay— Yes, let them watch. I guess they've that much coming to them in the way of action."

II

ALL the way out to the main highway the colonel cursed. He cursed the rain, the car he sat in and the road he bounced on. And especially he cursed the whippersnapper captain who would drag men out of warn blankets and put them to patrolling empty trails.

The car floundered through a small lake and swerved on to the highway. The driver shifted his gears into high. The car picked up speed toward San Diego. The colonel glared at the wet slopes and at the driver's back. He looked down at his wrist watch. The headquarters of the regiment was about halfway between San Diego and Bravos. Twenty miles. An hour at least at the rate they would have to run over the treacherous mountain road.

The car proceeded slowly around the sharp curves, speeded up, slowed again. The colonel nodded, shook himself, nodded again. His head dropped against his chest, lolling lightly from side to side with the gentle motion of the car. The driver, a young soldier recruited in the place of the regular assigned chauffeur—who had come out second best in an argument with a San Diego policeman—drove stolidly on, thinking of his breakfast.

On a long, straight stretch of road, he saw coming toward him many motor trucks. Empty fruits, bound for the

Imperial Valley, he thought. He edged to the right of the road. Better give those five-ton babies plenty of room . . .

Miraculously, mysteriously, the trucks turned sharply off the road. A deep dimple of ground between two low hills swallowed them. The young soldiers drove on, mildly curious. The colonel snored. The car approached the turnoff. The bulk of the big trucks blocked the narrow road. The careful young driver drew up in a cluster of greasewood. Better wait than be swiped off into that dim valley below.

Mounted men came jangling up. Rain dripped from their carelessly punched Stetsons. Rifles in wet, black leather scabbards swung from their heavy saddles. Gleaming drops of rain hung from the ends of the knots that tied their chin strings. They showed white teeth in dark faces at the young soldier.

The colonel woke with a jerk.

"What in hell's the matter?"

"Turn to the left—*hagame el favor, señor.*"

A dripping figure, loose, gay, graceful, swung from his silver studded saddle and leaned down so that his face was close to the red one in the tonneau of the car.

"Who the hell are you? Get off the road there."

"Please to follow those trucks," the rider said quietly.

He drew a revolver from the gaudy holster at his side. It had magnificent handle pieces of gray streaked white pearl. Its hammer came back with a sharp click.

"Please to obey, *mi Coronel.*"

A mass of Mexican riders pressed their horses forward, blocking the road.

The young officer, still bending toward the tonneau, cursed them smilingly.

"*Adelante*—"

He swung his revolver muzzle smoothly so that it pointed at the left ear of the young soldier driver. It was a fine, outstanding mark.

"Drive quickly, please."

The colonel cursed the haste and mockery that contributed to his present unarmed state. He cursed villainously and valiantly.

"You like I should shoot your soldier? No? Then tell heem to drive on, please. Behin' those las' truck there."

The colonel exploded one final, magnificently profane phrase, unuttered since his Philippine days.

"Go ahead, Smiley," he said in a gasping voice. "The damned fool may blow your head off."

Smiley moved as though a racing flag had dropped. The car swung to the left. It slithered in the slimy 'dobe mud, through the cleft in the hills, wallowing and bounding in low gear toward the wire fence that marked the sovereign State of California from the not so sovereign state of Baja California . . .

THE colonel sat on a very rough bench in a thick walled 'dobe room. Deep, small windows threw toward him the sickly light of late afternoon. From outside came the steady, monotonous roar of methodical battle. A quick burst of dust appeared at the window high over his head. Behind him the partition of the room shook as though struck sharply with a maul. The colonel rose, cursed, and moved about the small room in quick, short strides. He dragged a narrow deal table close under the nearest window, climbed up on it and pushed his head out through the deep embrasure. The light changed in his hard eyes as he swung his head from left to right. Spread as though on some giant, martial canvas, the picture of battle stood boldly out. And to his trained and expert eye each movement and installation told a significant story.

The *cuartel*, where he was confined, was on the town's edge, just back from the support trenches. He could see the soldiers of Gonzales crouching there. He saw them light cigarets, tip their rifles jauntily across their shoulders before pushing forward around the bend of the communicating trenches. He could see partially into the next building through the open door. There was an aid station there, and hard-

ened as he was to the backwash of war, he turned his eyes quickly away.

Gonzales' men were being shot out of their trenches. .37 mm. mortars were blowing great holes in the soft parapets and tearing ragged gaps in the maze of wire. One-pounder cannon were blasting methodically and accurately at machine gun emplacements. Attacking troops were brazenly coming out into the open.

The colonel began to curse again. *His* side was being licked. Yes, his. Wasn't he here among them? He stared toward what should be the flanks of the attacker's lines. The left dropped away sharply from the level of the plain. Cavalry down there, of course. Soon now, when the front line gave. The psychological moment. He knew. He had been a horse soldier all his life—or almost all: they'd shanghaied him during this last ruleless war into a doughboy outfit . . .

The door behind him opened softly. Leardo stood and looked up at the broad back.

" 'S *dias, Coronel.*"

The colonel, aware of his dignity, stepped haughtily down from the table.

"This damned outrage—" he began.

Leardo's mouth tightened. He was black with battle and ugly with weariness.

"I'll send you out to Torres," he said. "But by the saints, you'll walk through the lines."

"You'll send me back across that fence," Bowman said coldly.

"After. After you see how a bandit—with a price on his head—does battle. I'll teach you a lesson in soldiering, my friend."

The old man roared.

"Why you—damn you, I commanded a brigade in France. I'd have had a division if—"

"Just child's talk. Look out that window. Watch those men of mine. I'll give you a pair of glasses. Check up on my officers. Then blat about your France."

"Damn it, I don't need glasses. Those soldiers of my regiment are working your machine guns, aren't they?"

"While you're skulking here behind 'dobe walls," Leardo said coldly.

"Skulking! *Skulking!* Why you—"

The old man stopped, choked by his choler. His face had become a fiery red. His hands clenched and unclenched against his thighs.

"But your *men* aren't skulking. Seven of them out there, working machine guns. Death traps. Four of them killed already."

The colonel shook this off. He choked the glow of pride that rose in him. Of course they weren't skulking . . .

"What's the idea—this childish kidnaping?"

"I didn't like your words back there at the gate, so I got orders, quickly, to my convoy. Your captain, Señor Crane, did his duty well—until you arrived to bungle things. Thank you, *Coronel*—"

"Bungle things!" The old man pawed at the table. "How long is this outrage going to last?"

"Until fate decides the issue," Leardo said.

"That won't be long. I'll have the pleasure of watching General Torres stand you against a wall."

"You will be beside me, *mi Coronel.*"

The old man hooted derisively.

"We've recognized Torres' government."

Gonzales said hotly:

"I know that *pelado* better than your government. If you're caught over here with us you'll get it. What does he care about France?"

"I'm in the uniform of an American officer."

"I'll see that that's explained to him. And the *pelado* hates you gringos anyway. You're just one of the boys, *mi Coronel.*"

"One of the boys?"

The colonel gasped at the indignity of the expression.

"One of the boys," Leardo said. "That's one thing I like about your race, Colonel—especially the Irish."

Bowman screwed his red face into a

mask of rage. He was speechless with indignation. He flopped his hands helplessly trying to get words out of his working mouth.

"Yes," Leardo continued evenly, "you've got over a hundred million people up there. One thousandth of them are professional soldiers. The rest look down on them. Call them gutter rats. Kick them into jail when they take a drink or lay their hand on a woman. Yet, *por Dios*, they've saved your hide in every disgraceful war you've waged." He waved his hand toward the window. "And some of them are out there now. Fighting because they love to fight—fighting as they always will."

"For your dirty money," Bowman said bitterly.

"No," Leardo said softly. "Not for money. Money merely helps them to kill the time between—"

BOWMAN sat down on the bench. He filled and lighted a disreputable black briar pipe. He glared over it at the Mexican. An uproar of machine gun fire broke out close at hand. The roar filled the little room. Leardo stepped up on the table and looked out. In spite of the contempt and ugliness that Bowman felt for this high handed bandit, he watched the Mexican's face with curious attention. He realized what the new position of that gun meant. It had been shelled out of its advanced position. Backs to the wall, now, out there. He could hear hoarse Spanish oaths. Officers insulting their men back into that murderous fire . . .

But Leardo's face was inflexible. Save for a slight lowering of his dark brows, he made no movement. A shell exploded, blasting the face of the *cuartel*. A part of the wall shuddered, buckled, fell away, showering them with dust.

"If you knew anything about soldiering," Bowman said, tamping his pipe with his forefinger, "you'd use your cavalry while you still have time."

"*Por Dios*," Leardo said without turning, "you call them cavalry then? Bandits, not long ago."

"Using familiar terms, that's all. *If* you had cavalry, that *was* cavalry."

"You ought to know," Leardo said. "They brought you in."

The old man choked.

"An unarmed man and a recruit! Hell, if that troop of mine had been within a mile they'd have jumped you like jackrabbits."

Leardo turned a furious face to the American.

"You think so, eh?"

He shouted at the door. One of the young officers who had been with him at the gate that morning stepped into the room. He was not spick and span now; and blood was seeping through a rag tied about his hatless head. Leardo shot sharp Spanish words at him. The young officer said nothing. When Leardo had completed his orders the officer touched the bandage with the edge of his hand, and withdrew.

"Get up here and look," Leardo said.

Bowman relighted his pipe.

"Why should I get up there?" he said.

"Afraid of the *balas*, eh? Well, they're coming plenty now."

"What's that? What did you call me?"

"Nothing," Leardo said.

"You say I was afraid?"

Bowman stalked toward the table, looking belligerently up at the Mexican.

"Come down here and say I'm afraid."

"Come up here and say you are not, señor," Leardo said with a shadowy grin.

Bowman leaped angrily up on to the rickety table.

"Go to hell," he said.

He stuck his face out through the bullet spattered walls of the window. Dust and small chips of 'dobe sifted against his red face. The wall of the building was checkered with bullet scars, the density of the pattern increasing every moment. Below them the machine gun ripped out a ceaseless, sullen chant.

"Great Scot!" Bowman said. "Delaney!"

Private Delaney, who had enjoyed

three satisfying wars, and now felt like a professional ball player caught on a sand lot, shuddered. Not because a one-pounder shell had just exploded ten yards to his left. A more spine tingling sound had come to his ears. A hoarse, rasping voice that he would remember to the day he retired—if he ever had that luck.

He eased the perfectly aligned belt carefully with his left hand. He shifted his long legs farther apart. He slapped the hot water jacket in front of him five mils right. He glared ferociously through the dust that shook down from the building behind him.

"Delaney!"

"Some one yellin' at you, Red."

Private Jim Conti, erstwhile troopmate, and himself a hanger-on of wars, laid down a full belt of machine gun ammunition long enough to punch his gunfellow.

"Some one yellin', Red."

"I don't hear you," Red said. His finger pressed harder on the machine gun trigger.

"Delaney! By the Lord, I'll try you, Delaney, if you don't answer me!"

Private Delaney lifted a mud splashed face. With fine surprise he said—

"Oh, it's you, Colonel Bowman."

"It's me," Colonel Bowman said.

"Think o' seein' you over here!" Delaney said hopefully.

"Get away from that damned gun! Do you hear me?"

"They's so much racket . . . What was that, Colonel?"

Delaney's finger was crooked hard around the trigger.

"I say—"

" 'Nother belt, kid," Private Conti said. "Who's the red faced guy?"

"Used to be a pal o' mine," Private Delaney said. "Here—don't gum that up thataway . . . You oughter know him. You used to be in his regiment."

Private Conti took another look, after a final tug on the new belt. The red face peering down at them from the window above suddenly clarified in the drifting dust.

"Fer cryin' out loud!" he said reverently. "The Old Man!"

"To the life," Red Delaney said fervently.

"Not long, though," Conti said. "Not if he don't pull his can in outa that winder."

"You're under arrest—both of you," came the rasping voice from the window.

"That makes two times for you today a'ready, Jim," Red said. "That spick captain pulled your belt 'counta that *mescal* eye opener he caught you with this A.M."

"Then it ain't legal, Red," Private Conti said. "Here, switch her over to the right a bit. Looks like horses or somethin' comin outa that draw—"

PRIVATE CONTI meant to say something more. But instead of words, a strange noise came from his throat. Then a great deal of blood, spurting. A Mauser bullet had severed his jugular with singular neatness. Red Delaney saw none of this. His red rimmed eyes were narrowed over the tarnished water jacket of his gun.

"I think I'm on, Jim. They can't eat *that*, the lousy bums."

But Jim didn't comment in kind, as was his wont.

" 'Nother belt, kid— Hey! Stir your stumps, guy!"

But Private Conti made no move. Didn't say, "Comin' up, big boy!"

"What the hell—?"

Red's grimy hands, cupped against the base of the gun, fell away. They dropped limply on to his lean thighs.

"Got you—little fella . . . Lord, they went an' got the little wop—"

Red wiped his forehead with the back of a hand. He stared stolidly out across the hazy open space between the trenches. Above him, in the window, Leardo was pointing.

"*Mira*—look," he said to Bowman. His voice was hoarse with exultation.

"Don't shove me like that. I see 'em. They won't get a hundred yards."

A mass of mounted men had swung into a ragged line just beyond the houses on the west of the town. Taunted, everything now at stake, Leardo was using his last reserves in a reckless throw for the relief of his lines. The best he could hope for was temporary confusion in the hostile ranks if the attack got home. A momentary respite, maybe until darkness. Given that chance, he could reorganize his position, preparatory to renewing the action in the morning with the possible help of troops from Tia Juana. It was a desperate hope. Torres' cavalry was even now moving on to the plain from the cover of the arroyo where it had awaited the psychological moment. That moment of beginning panic, fragmentary breaking of a line, that was like the writing on the wall to a commander who knew the priceless value of even a handful of mounted men.

But another emotion whipped up Leardo's fierce fighting blood. This cold, condescending gringo must be shown. France. Bah! Railroads running up to the lines, piling up masses of ammunition and rations by the truckload ready to their hands. Skilled doctors, nurses, bands and military funerals. The whole world—a sympathetic world, too—at their back to retreat through . . .

For a moment, Leardo, the wily leader of men, had let his passion dictate his tactics.

"Better coordinate that charge with your covering fire," Bowman said casually, "or they won't get a hundred yards."

"Damn you," Leardo said softly.

He hated this man more now that he had pointed out the obvious that he himself had left undone. He screamed down at Red Delaney, berating him in Spanish and English to quit his day dreaming and open up on the hostile cavalry. Red still leaned forward over his gun, staring blankly down at Conti's sprawling body. Bowman also began to yell at Red.

"Get away from that gun, Delaney! Get back where you belong to the other side! Report to your troop commander under arrest!"

This last voice awoke dim memories in Red Delaney. He shook himself. He spat a great stream of tobacco juice on the wet earth beside him.

"Oh, go to hell, ol' tomato face!"

He had finally got off an expression, used often in private, that it had been his ambition for years to shout in public. He felt much better. He jerked the brass tag of the gun belt, dug in his heels, and the gun trembled and grew hotter under his hands. True to the mark sped Red's vengeance for Private Conti. Still close packed, at the top of the draw, Torres' cavalry shook under the blast. Horses fell in their tracks. Others, plunging riderless, tore across the battle front, their wild screams coming faintly to the defenders in the town.

"Take that—an' *like* it!" Red Delaney said. "I'm gettin' them good, boy," he said to what was left of Private Conti.

Gonzales' cavalry was now deployed on the plain. It moved forward at a graceful, orderly gallop. The little cow horses were quiet and steady. The men leaned forward in their saddles, raised pistols eased against their shoulders.

"There's obedience for you," Leardo said. "You can't even make a private obey your orders."

A machine gun spray tore at the wall just below them. It sent dust and chips into Bowman's face. He paid no more attention to the thudding bullets than he would have to a shower of Summer rain.

"What's that!" he roared. "I can't, eh?"

He was off the table and away before Leardo could answer. Out the unguarded door he flew. Down the slippery slope between the *cuartel* wall and Private Delaney's broad back.

"Get to hell away from that gun!"

RED DELANEY continued to send hot lead into the swarming mounted men of Torres. But it was not so easy now. Alert glasses had picked up this hornet's nest. Hostile counter-battery guns were sited.

Bullets whipped the mud about the gun. It was emplaced behind a low adobe wall that had once been a part of a stout little building. The gun itself was in the base of the old chimney and so was enclosed on all sides by a waisthigh protection against small arms fire.

But the law of the bullet is a mysterious equation. Bowman, rushing upright into the sheave of fire, reached the machine gun position untouched. Private Red Delaney, protected up to his middle, apparently tempted the vagaries of the gods of war. Cursing monotonously as he fired, he leaned momentarily to one side, the better to observe the effect of his fire. That slight movement did it. The movement continued. Private Delaney slipped slowly, farther and farther to the right, until his face lay close against the wet mud that had been churned by his groping feet against the 'dobe wall.

"Get up, damn you! Get back there to your proper duty."

But Red Delaney wasn't getting up. He was staying there in the mud, close to his buddy, Private Conti . . .

Bowman bent over, stirring the man with his hand. A pool of red joined the brown mud water, turning it darker still. Then Colonel Bowman saw Conti, crooked, warped, lying there with his face in the mud. He couldn't see Conti's face, but the collar ornaments on Conti's blouse were things he knew—and loved. He couldn't know, as he stood there in that whistling rain of bullets, that all the Mexicans in Bravos could not have made Conti or Delaney take off those ornaments . . .

One slow, deep oath rose from the Old Man's throat. Then he leaped into the gun emplacement. He tore his Sam Browne belt from him. It cramped the movement of his arms. Gently he pushed Delaney's body away from the gun. He straddled the tripod. His tight blouse pulled at his back and elbows. He ripped it from him. And for good measure he hurled it far away. As it thudded to the mud below the wall, bullets set it leaping as though alive.

The old man's face was red through the sprouting white hairs of his growing beard. His thin white hair stood on end like that of some ageless kewpie doll. His blue eyes gleamed, feverishly, with hate. He slammed back the bolt of the gun. Let it clang forward. Settled himself viciously behind the butt piece.

No spicks were going to kill his men and get away with it!

The gun came to throbbing life under his hands. A stream of hate blew outward. Craftily he watched the rushing line that was Leardo's. He'd as soon hew down one side as the other, but it was Torres' men who had killed that idiot Delaney . . .

The gun jammed. Bowman jerked at the bolt, tore up the cover. Expertly he used the base of a cartridge to relieve the trouble. Only an instant, and the gun was beating out its steady song again. Bullets slammed into the wall in front of him, ripped up showers of mud. His face looked like that of an old roué, clay packed in a barber's chair. A slug whipped the shirt from his left arm, leaving behind a seeping trail of blood. Getting hot. Hot as the hell he was always talking about. A three-inch shell burst close. For a moment the cloud it left wiped out the scene before him. Then, rubbing his red eyes, he went on with his work.

The gun jammed. This time to stay. He saw to his amazement that the barrel was choked to the muzzle with lead.

"Damned fools. Ought to be tried—running a gun without water . . ."

He stood up, staring around him a little stupidly. Men were passing him, running. Almost a platoon, ragged, panicky, came rushing on, their hands empty.

"Get back there. Fight!" the old man roared. Then leaped to life in him all the latent Spanish curses he had known in the days of the Empire.

He drove them back with his hands—beating at them, cursing horribly. These were the kind of dogs that had let Red Delaney and the other six of his men die.

This mud splashed, terrible man with the white hair frightened them more than the bullets nipping at their heels. They couldn't see the bullets. But they did see a pair of blazing blue eyes—eyes like those of a dog gone suddenly mad.

They went back to the trenches. They picked up the rifles they had cast aside. They pointed out to this madman a machine gun lying on its back. A steam of fire poured outward, blasting at the rushing men of Torres.

But it was too late. A spontaneous, triumphant wave was upon them. Leardo's charge had been beaten down with artillery and machine gun fire. The few troopers left alive were galloping frantically to the cover of the mesquite, far to the right of the town. Torres' men poured into the trenches.

"*Madre de Dios!* Mercy, friend Federalista! . . ." cried the beaten men.

The colonel went down, the machine gun hot in his hands.

III

THE red sun broke through the moody clouds. It gleamed hot, satirical, from a cleft in the western mountains. A rainbow arched the heavens. The eery light bathed the northern wall of the *cuartel*, as yet untouched by Torres' bullets. But not for long.

Against it stood a still line of men. Shadows of men, only. Muddy, torn, apathetic, they stood there, the smoke of a cigaret curling upward here and there. Leardo stood head and shoulders above them—all of them, except one. He stood next to Leardo and matched him with height and girth. His face, too, was streaked with 'dobe clay. His hair stood on end like that of some ageless kewpie doll. He ceased his violent cursing and now glared straight in front of him.

Another line of men faced those strung along the wall. Their alignment was no better. Their interval was the same. Their faces, only, were different. More pleasant. Some smiling. Some, even—the more vain—had washed recently. They held rifles negligently against the toes of their boots.

A paunchy, much mustached man stood between the two lines. His face was yellow, his hair a coarse black. A thin smile parted his thick lipped mouth. He was finishing a job he would prone have lingered over. But he was hungry, and very thirsty. He had heard that the best *mescal* in all lower California came from this little town of Bravos. He would see. So he reluctantly drew his pleasant little harangue to a close.

"So you die because of how you have lived, señores. And I do not doubt it will be as true Mexicans have been taught to die—"

The men of the firing squad shifted their feet expectantly. They, too, were thirsty. And in the clothes of these targets before them were doubtless gold pieces. That had been said of the men of California Baja. Much gold. And it was theirs by the laws of war.

Torres turned. He smiled at a slim young officer who stood in front of a flank of the executioners. The lines of the young officer's face tightened. Doubtless, before long, he would like this work he had been chosen to do. But right now— Abruptly he cut short the musing. A señorita back there in Monterey—a pale yellow rose in her black hair, always. Even now—

"*Fuego, señor,*" Torres said pleasantly.

The young man turned. He looked along the line of his men.

A single shot echoed out, close by in the town. Torres looked up, annoyed. Drinking already, in spite of his orders. He turned to an officer near him. He would stop that nonsense.

"Find that man. Shoot him in place."

Another shot. The sound of a galloping horse came to them. This was even more annoying. Would he never get to that drink of golden *mescal?*

Down the single long street a horse came into view. It was stretched out at an extended gallop. Along its neck lay an olive drab figure. On came the horse. No more shots, now. Men stepped back

against the building, staring with wondering eyes.

"An American officer," Torres said, half to himself.

"It's your man—Crane," Leardo said.

"The damned ass," Bowman said.

Crane pulled the panting horse up abruptly. He slid to the ground in front of Torres.

"Those men of yours were firing at me," he said.

Torres smiled.

"You come out of the clouds, señor. Even my men wouldn't understand that."

"Captain Crane—"

"Thank God, there you are, sir."

"You ought to be tried for this, sir!" the Old Man roared.

The young officer's face whitened.

"What's this! They're not putting you against a wall, sir! Why, the dirty—"

"Who are you, Captain?" Torres said, stepping forward. An ugly twist had narrowed his fat lips.

Crane looked at him.

"You're General Torres?"

"The captor of this town," Torres said haughtily.

"Then I have come to bring my colonel back."

In spite of the threatening rifles, Bowman strode from the wall. He glared into Torres' face.

"Now, damn you, will you believe me? You heard what Colonel Gonzales said awhile back. Now you hear what this officer has to say."

Torres bowed low.

"I am very sorry, *mi Coronel*—but still you have to explain why you were in those trenches weeth arms in your hands."

"I demand, as an American officer, that you send me and Captain Crane back to United States territory under safe escort."

Torres shrugged.

"Thees officer, yes—" he pointed to Crane. "But as for you, *mi Coronel*—" He waved his hand languidly. "Ah, that I can not do."

Crane's hand dropped to his pistol butt.

"Then—"

"Don't be a damned fool all your life," Bowman said. "Get on back there where you belong. You've got your duty to think of, young man."

"But I'm not going to leave you—"

The Old Man's eyes blazed.

"Damn it, you heard my orders! I'll write out a set of charges for you right now if it's my last act!"

Leardo laughed hoarsely.

"That's all I needed to die happy, *mi Coronel*," he said.

Crane looked at his colonel as though the man had gone suddenly mad. He again appealed to Torres.

"Listen, you idiot," Bowman broke in. "What he says is true."

Crane looked bewildered. The poor old colonel had gone mad under the strain.

He said, patiently:

"Smiley got away, sir. In the excitement, they forgot about him, I expect. He said they captured you and were holding you. This is all nonsense about you fighting maching guns—"

"Nonsense, hell!" the Old Man roared. He jerked his head toward Torres' men. "Ask them. They'll tell you it was no nonsense. You think I'm going to let them kill seven of my men and get away with it?"

"Good Lord!" Crane said.

"Now you get back there and call headquarters," the Old Man said.

The word headquarters sent a start through Crane. His eyes closed slightly as though a bright secret had come to him. His manner changed abruptly. He nodded at the colonel. He turned abruptly to Torres.

"Then, General Torres," he said quietly, "our regiment will have to attack. We hoped to avoid more bloodshed."

Torres' mouth fell open.

"Attack?"

Crane jerked up his wrist. He glanced at his watch.

"The dispositions are made. If I did not return in fifteen minutes they were to move out."

SUDDENLY Colonel Bowman emitted a loud, mulish laugh. He held his sides as he shook with it. Torres looked sharply at him, a question on his face.

"Hell of a joke to be shot down by your own troopers, eh, Torres? But they'll get you, too. They'll wipe this town clean!"

Now Torres moved fast. There were troops across there; he knew that. But he had not thought so many. But here was their colonel to prove it. What was a colonel doing, running about with no regiment? The answer was—that he was not. He must have led his command up under cover of night.

Torres knew when he was licked—or about to be. He had accomplished his main mission. Bravos was his. This might all be a bluff. But why take chances?

He beckoned to the driver of his car. It was the best found in Bravos and had been immediately commandeered. Leardo looked at it wistfully as it splashed up, halting close to Torres. Well, he'd had his last ride in that one . . .

Torres, in near panic, almost lifted the American colonel into the seat of honor. A stream of ceremonial and apologetic words ran suavely from his mobile mouth. My God—any minute now! Damn these phlegmatic gringos! Would they never get out?

But hardboiled old Bowman was not to be lifted by anyone he had yet met. He shoved Torres' eager hands from him. He took several measured and deliberate steps and stood before Leardo Gonzales. For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes. Torres bit the ends of his mustache and rubbed his fat hands nervously together.

"*Madre de Dios!* Plees to be queek, *Coronel!*" In imagination he already heard the thunder of charging horses—wild *Yanqui* cries of battle . . .

A dazzling smile lighted Leardo's haggard face. He held out his hand with impulsive sincerity. His words were low and clear.

"*Adios, amigo*—"

"You know my regiment isn't over there," Bowman said, pitching his voice so that the others could not hear. "Why didn't you tell Torres?"

"Why did I tell him who you were?"

"I'll be damned if I know," Bowman said. "You said you—"

"Ah, my friend—that was before."

Torres strode up, his face livid.

"*Señor Coronel!*"

Again Leardo held out his hand, smiling.

"*Adios*—"

"*Adios*—hell! You're coming back with me."

Torres stood stupidly staring. The quick English was too much for him, but Bowman's actions were not.

"No, no, señor; he is *prisionero!*"

Bowman continued half dragging Leardo to the car. Armed men pushed forward. Rifles came up.

"Get away from here!" Bowman yelled at them.

Leardo held back.

"But, Colonel—"

"Get in that car."

Crane, his hand on his pistol, looked down alertly from his horse.

"Get back—across," Bowman said to him.

Torres clutched at Bowman's sleeve.

"Take your hand off me, you—" he turned to Leardo—"what was that you were calling him?"

Leardo looked straight at Torres.

"*Pelado*—skinned one," Leardo said.

Torres cursed and whipped out his pistol. The muzzle swung upward, reaching toward Leardo's head.

"Pull that trigger—"

"There's five minutes left, sir," Crane said, glancing at the wrist of his bridle hand.

Bowman, staring contemptuously at Torres, pushed Leardo into the car. A ring of bayonets gleamed blood-red in the light of the sinking sun. Torres' eyes dropped from the fierce blue ones blazing at him. He shrugged. He waved the rifles away. He nodded to the

Mexican driver in the front seat of the car. He saluted Bowman carefully. His black eyes, bright with hate, settled for a moment on Leardo Gonzales, for whom now he held more bitterness than any man on earth.

"*Adios—pelado.*"

"Step on it," Bowman said.

The gears meshed, the exhaust roared, the car swayed down the rutted road. Crane rode beside it, his hand against the butt of his pistol. But they were not molested as they slid by the shattered adobe houses of the town.

One hundred yards—two. A sharp turn to the left and the gate was in sight. Curious dark eyes watched their passing. The lurking soldiers of Torres stood in doorways, peered from windows, stepped back against the fronts of the buildings, watching them go in silence.

Each second they expected a shot, a roar of following fire. The two men in the back seat sat hunched forward, eyes shifting from side to side.

"*Mas pronto!*" Bowman said thickly to the driver.

The man turned, questioning with his eyes. He looked at Leardo.

"*Despacio,*" Leardo said. "Go slowly, *amigo.*"

The car turned, the tires sinking deep in the wheeltracks of the road. There stood the gate, wide, hospitable, swung back. Swung back by two troopers in olive drab, their rifles caught close against their shoulders. And behind them the troop, the horses pawing. They had not yet been fed.

Old Mullins rode forward as the car stopped at the line. There was no expression of any kind in his face. Then came a shade of annoyance as a roar went up from the troop.

"Cut out that yellin' back there," Mullins said.

Bowman got out of the car stiffly. Every muscle in his body ached. He was getting too old for this damn nonsense. Leardo descended and stood beside him. Crane dismounted. They all stood and looked at the yelling troopers. A strange look came into the old colonel's eyes. He rubbed them with the back of his hand.

"I'll bet those roughnecks are hungry," he said. "Always yell that way when they're hungry."

There was a quizzical smile on Leardo's face.

"They're fine fighting men," he said. "And now—?"

"Now what?" the Old Man barked.

"You turn me over, I suppose. Those detectives from Los Angeles?"

"What detectives?" the Old Man roared. "Right now you and I are going to get some chow. Then I'm going over and get my car and my blouse—we can't ride down to San Diego in these rags—and then I'm driving you to Tia Juana. Bonilla might buy us a drink, eh?"

Leardo said nothing. He stood silently, looking back across the hills where the glow was dying out of the few soft clouds still left in the heavens.

"*Gracias, señor Coronel,*" he said softly.

And as the words died on his lips a distant volley sent echoes into the monntains.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

THE Camp-fire cache has been deluged with poison ivy preventives, cures and specifics. Letters have reached me quoting everything from rare old herbals to the latest works on immunology. Here's just one more suggested remedy from a reader who seems to have tried everything else, with no luck:

Los Angeles, California

Apropos Morton Grove's letter regarding poison ivy:

For years, every time I went into the woods, I contracted a violent case of poison ivy. And while poison ivy to some folks may be a source of mirth, in my case I'd just as soon be snake-bitten, because I wouldn't be any worse poisoned. During a period of some twenty years battling poison ivy, I suspect that I've tried every known "remedy", beginning with red precipitate in grease, to and including zinc ointment, mercuric ointment, mercurichrome, the patented pills and "shots" put out by both by Eastern and Western firms, and everything else any one ever heard of.

Last year I took a deerhunt in northern California and on that trip I got the worst case I ever had. I finally ended up in bed flat on my back, with the eruptions all over me. I kept trying doctors' prescriptions, the internal and external medicaments that Grove mentions, and all I got was —worse. At the end of ten days I was in pretty bad shape and desperate measures were indicated. I took them. I procured a 10 per cent. solution of ferric chloride and tortured myself with it for three days. Ordinarily, this will cure any case of poison ivy—but mine only spread. Finally, I made up a 10 per cent. solution of plain every day permanganate of potash, dabbed it on the eruptions several times—and in *fifteen minutes* the torment had ceased. I continued the treatment, and two days

later was up and nearly recovered. Inasmuch as this $KMnO_4$ did the work after all the patented stuff, the old reliable ferric chloride, and all the rest of the remedies—including baking soda, table salt, and a remedy brewed from cascara bark by an Injun squaw—had failed, I feel the information should be passed on to others.

—JACK PENROD

LUPTON A. WILKINSON, whose story "The Sun Shines Bright" is his first to appear in our pages, gives a few pertinent facts about himself to the members of Camp-fire.

New York, N. Y.

Born, New Orleans.

Traveled, every State in the Union, every country in Europe and in Central America.

Book agent, newspaperman, latterly "publicist".

Favorite amusements: poetry, horse-races, detective stories, bridge, fishing.

Favorite fiction magazine—believe it or not—*Adventure.*

Aversions: radio, automobiles, blondes.

Write literary criticism for the *North American Review;* philosophical essays for *The Thinker,* gang and mystery stories for half a dozen magazines. Two volumes of verse.

WHEN I wrote "The Sun Shines Bright" I was living on a plantation, fifteen miles from a telephone or railroad, in coastal South Carolina. When I got the check I was living in a hotel on 46th Street, New York, close enough to throw a brick (I didn't) at Broadway. When the story appears, I shall be living in a bungalow on Fire Island.

I used to fritter away a lot of time working, but the doctors told me my time was limited, so I spend more of it now in the serious occupation of enjoying life.

I am glad to be in *Adventure* for two reasons:

1. I have always admired an editorial policy which treats of only the vivid things of life, and does it in English.

2. My boy will think I am a real writer at last.

—LUPTON A. WILKINSON

A LETTER of exceptions on points of railroading, in connection with Allan Vaughan Elston's novelette, "Mile a Minute Murder", in the June 1st issue.

Winsted, Connecticut

I read the first *Adventure* ever published and from that day to this I don't suppose I have ever missed more than twelve or fifteen copies. And I haven't missed an issue for at least sixteen years.

I always read the Camp-fire and Ask Adventure depts. first. I don't believe there is any place on earth where so much information, about so many unusual subjects, is available to the interested reader, as in the above mentioned depts.

The practise of permitting the readers to jack up the authors on technical errors is all to the good. It surely keeps the writers and the editors on their toes, and it gives the rest of us information, from specialists in their line, that we never would get otherwise.

I HAVE greatly enjoyed Allan Vaughan Elston's mystery stories. But now, as a result of reading his "Mile a Minute Murder", I have got to "climb his hump."

From the viewpoint of an experienced railroad man (over twenty years in a locomotive cab on a number of different roads) everything is wrong that could be wrong in this story. I hardly know where to begin:

Mr. Elston has it that thirty miles an hour is too much speed for a man to get off a train safely. A good man can get on at considerable higher speed than that; no trouble at all. One can safely get off at a higher speed than he can get on.

Conductor Connolly receives a message to stop his train at Moselle. The engineer knows nothing about this, in the story. The engineer always receives all orders and messages and the conductor also gets a copy.

BRAKEMAN RAEGAN is supposed to have turned the angle cock on the train line, thus making the train brakes inoperative. Closing the angle cock on the brake pipe, back of the tank, would cause the brakes of the entire train, except the engine, to leak on. In a very few seconds the brakes would begin to drag and in two or three miles the train would stall dead. Closing the angle cock of the signal line has no effect on the brakes. It simply makes the whistle signal, in the cab, inoperative.

How can anybody get out of a vestibule train and get to the top of the cars, while train is in motion? This would be a trick worth knowing.

CONDUCTOR CONNOLLY, looking ahead, out of the vestibule, seeing a red board which the engineer failed to acknowledge, took three minutes to pull the air. Train had gone three miles. Any member of a train crew, seeing the engineer about to run a board, would have sprung the air before train was by the station.

Suppose the brakes didn't leak on when the train line angle cock was closed. The conductor's valve would function when opened and put all train brakes back of closed angle cock in emergency.

Angle cocks are not within eight inches of the ties. They are just beneath the end sills of the cars and can easily be opened or closed by a man

standing between the cars. With his hands, not his feet.

Sixty miles an hour is not a fearful rate of speed. Seventy-five or eighty is common enough, any day and especially when the hogger has to pick up 37 minutes in 114 miles.

Then sometimes we really wheel them, and if I mentioned top speeds, the really unusual speeds, you would think I was trying to take you for a ride.

THIS train, of at least seven or eight Pullman cars, made a run of 114 miles without taking water. Had a foot of water in the tank at end of run. This indicates a tank capacity of something like 15,000 gals. The manhole cover of a tank this size would be four or five feet long instead of twenty inches, and to see *Brakeman Raegan* in this tank, without putting a light down in the tank, would be another one of those things.

I hope this criticism is taken in the spirit in which it is given. I haven't been technical. Can do if necessary. The statements I have made are correct. All roads are not the same by any means, but none are like Mr. Elston pictured it. Writing railroad stories correct in technical detail just can't be done if you haven't been there.

I repeat, I have enjoyed Mr. Elston's stories very much and hope to read many more of then but, Mr. Elston, please stop playing around cars!

—ARTHUR W. PIERCE

Mr. Elston's reply:

Pasadena, California

Your letter, forwarded from *Adventure,* brings up nine points of controversy on "Mile a Minute Murder":

1. You say thirty miles an hour is not too much speed for a man to get off a train. It is, I maintain, for any one else than a trainman. If you read my story carefully you will see that the train only went as slowly as thirty an hour up the Cuba Hill; thence it followed a down water grade to St. Louis at about sixty an hour. Prior to reaching the top of the Cuba Hill, only laymen passengers were suspected. Therefore the real murderer's temptation to hop off bears no relation to any speed less than fifty or sixty an hour.

As for an ordinary passenger jumping off at thirty an hour, I insist it would be extremely perilous. Let some one drive an auto until the speedometer stands steadily at thirty, then try hopping off the running board! A train is more difficult because its step is higher than that of a car; also the train is raised on a crown of ballast which in turn is either on a fill or in a cut. It is my stand that the average layman, jumping from a train at thirty an hour, would need to be carried away on a stretcher. I can, though, readily see that this point is controversial. If it were discussed in Camp-fire I imagine many readers would come forward with arguments pro and con. I suggest that before doing so they try the automobile test. After that they will probably have their arm in a sling and thus not be able to write at all.

2. True, an engineer gets a copy of every train order. But this wasn't a train order. A train order is not in a sealed envelop or in any envelop at all. In my story is the statement, "Connolly saw immediately that it was not a train order." If anything it was a murder order, a police matter intended only for the conductor's eyes; thus we can not apply the train order rule to this message.

3. I did not say anything about the "brake pipe". If by brake pipe you mean the air hose, I admit that turning its cock would cause the brakes of all vehicular units back of it to "leak" on and stop the train. *Raegan* would have defeated his own purpose by turning that cock; what he actually turned was the angle cock of the air signal hose and I so stated.

4. Bear in mind that I described the doors of this modern train. They were the double type, an upper half opening independently. Thus the lower half would have provided a foot rest for the tall and active *Raegan.*

5. There is no place in the story where I said, or even intimated, that the conductor, after seeing a red board ahead, waited three minutes before pulling the air.

6. You must confine this point to the angle cock in question—the cock of the air signal-hose *back of the tank.* You say that I have it too low and that a man standing between cars could easily open it with his hands, not needing to use his feet. Yours is one of two letters I've received on the subject. The other comes from another experienced railroader who says that I have it too accessible; he says that *Raegan* could not have opened it even with his foot, much less with his hands. So I seem to have struck a mean between you.

Actually, while writing the story, I went to the Santa Fé depot and waited for a train to pull in. When one did, I accosted the fireman when he descended to the platform. I said: "Please put your finger on the angle cock of the air-signal hose back of the tank". He obliged me. I saw that it was under the coupling and less than a foot above the ground. I saw that it would be extremely difficult for a man to cling there at high speed and turn it, that he would have to use his foot; but the more difficult it was the better it suited me, just so it could be done. Had it been easy it would have done no good for *Raegan* to turn it. For in that case the old conductor could have come along and turned it back.

7. About not taking water: You forget the profile of the division, which I chose exactly to cover the water question. I chose a division whose last 85 miles is down a river valley with a gently, though constantly falling, grade. Being forced to, the train could be run down such a profile on a single tank of water, with a little left at the end of the run. The intention was to intimate that the supply was almost, though not quite, used up. On a routine run the train might have taken water to

be on the safe side, once on the division. Here though there was no opportunity to choose.

8. Yes, the manhole might have been four feet long instead of two. I merely preferred to take a minimum instead of a maximum. What I was afraid of was that some reader would write in and say the hole wasn't big enough for a big man to get in. To forestall that, I made the hole a minimum dimension and yet big enough for human entry.

Incidentally, while looking up this manhole dimension at the time of writing the story, I consulted Conductor Clancy who for many years has run the Shasta Limited of the U.P., who has just been retired on a pension and who lived near my office. Upon assuring me that the manhole was plenty large enough for a big man to enter, Clancy told me that his train once carried from division point to division point thirty cases of fine Canadian liquor submerged under water in his tank, all members of the train and engine crew being innocent. A bootlegging hostler at one division point had merely shipped the liquor to a hostler at the other.

And by the way, this Conductor Clancy described his Shasta Limited to me in minute detail, arrangement of cars, hose lines, vestibule doors, etc., and I used it verbatim in the story. For a division, though, I dared not choose any other than the one I did, because of the grades; also I myself worked on the railroad used in the story during 1910, '11 and '12.

9. You say 60 miles an hour is not a fearful rate of speed. It is if you can't stop. In my story no one paid any attention to the speed until it became uncontrollable. Then it became fearful. Then it was exactly sixty miles an hour too fast.

And relatively, 60 miles an hour is fast under any circumstances. It is about three times as fast as the world's fastest human, Frank Wycoff, can run. When he broke the world's record by running a hundred yards in 9.4 seconds, he was only going about twenty an hour. Once on the plains of Texas I drove a car alongside a frightened antelope, kept pace with the animal at what seemed to be its best speed and noted that the car's speedometer only read 43 miles an hour.

So when you ride a train at 60 an hour you're moving along—especially if you can't stop. And that was the point of my story.

—ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

A FEW words from Victor Shaw relative to his story "Spirit Meat" in this issue.

Loring, Alaska

During my Arctic trip of 1897, one of our Eskimos was Kyua, a Nugumiut Innuit, who in a knife battle with a polar bear had been injured just as was Sunah of my tale. Of the several families with us, many were excellent hunters, but they all despised Kyua for his crippled condition and left him to work with the women. One day, when they had all been without meat and game seemed scarce, the hunters all went out determined to score—or bust, leaving Kyua as usual. When well away, Kyua borrowed my rifle and set out quietly in another direction.

When the others came in, blanked, Kyua was sitting contentedly in camp while the koonahs were packing in two fat caribou which he had killed. Old Uapee glared at the grinning cripple, who had unobtrusively given them a lesson in hunting, and grunted in his broken English: "I no see *tuktoo* (deer). What's the matter—I dunno."

I've merely expanded the true incident.

—VICTOR SHAW

HERE are a few interesting questions posed by members of the 'Fire. Some of you will probably have no trouble in answering them.

First, one regarding albatross, by Bill Adams, of our Writers' Brigade:

Dutch Flat, California

In a recent story of yours the author speaks of albatross somewhere in the South Seas. I did not know that albatross were to be met within the waters in which this tale is set. I don't say that they are not met with. They very possibly are. There were always countless albatross off the Horn, and they followed the ships around and on for some distance up the Pacific; but they always left us before they got very far north.

There were many sea birds for which sailors had names that were no doubt not their correct names. I recall birds we called "ice birds" and also "cape hens", and think that our names were probably not the real names. It may be that the author of this yarn speaks of some bird that is known as an albatross and that is not really one. Or it may be that he speaks of the real albatross. I am not able to say. I have never met them as far north as Pitcairn.

Porpoises are often spoken of as dolphins. The nomenclature of the sea is a very mixed up affair all round. I think that it often happens that people speak of some sea bird as an albatross when said bird is not an albatross at all. To me the albatross proper is a very regal thing. There were multitudes of them round us for the six weeks we spent off the Horn on my first voyage. To hear some less noble fowl called one is a bit belittin'.

There are, you know, several varieties of albatross. The fellow I always have in mind is a whopper. I stand six feet two and a half. With extended arms, horizontal, I can hold the wing tops of the great white albatross in my fingers, and the bird, standing on the deck, is by no means stretched. I think there is a sooty albatross and also the "wandering

albatross". Maybe the latter is to be found amidst the South Sea Islands? —BILL ADAMS

Regarding Borneo "body shrinkers":

Newark, New Jersey

Well, fellows, I thought I'd like to elbow my way in and ask one from some one who knows Borneo. What I want to know is: Is there, or has there ever been, a tribe whose medicine-men, conjurors or witch-doctors can do anything like shrinking the human body? An old adventurer I know said that he had seen with his own eyes a man's body shrunk, or shrunken, to eighteen inches in height! Sounds pretty fishy to me. Perhaps some of you boys can and will tell me something about "body shrinkers". I've been about some my own sweet self, in my short and rather uneventful life, 69 next month, and I'll be darned if I ever heard of body shrinkers. But I have seen and dined in the jungle with those little fellows whose doctors shrink a human head to the size of one of Babe Ruth's baseballs.

Will one of you please give me some dope on this? —HENRY WILLIS MITCHELL

Regarding Bully Hayes, notorious South Sea Island rover. A brief account of him and his activities appeared in Ask Adventure, June 1st issue. However, I shall be glad to print any additional information worthy of note:

Balboa, Canal Zone

For a number of years I have read occasional articles about Bully Hayes, the old time pirate, blackbirder and pearl poacher of the Pacific. Some were frankly fiction. Others pretended to be authentic, but I was quite dubious about their accuracy. Now I am wondering if any one on your staff or any of your readers knows the genuine story of Hayes.

Three or four years ago in a magazine (I think it was the *Proceedings of the Naval Institute*) appeared an article which, if I remember correctly, stated that Hayes was born in 1812 and served in the Federal Navy during the Civil War. A couple years ago a Boston newspaper in an account said that Hayes was born in the '50's, and that his principal activities in the Pacific were from 1870 to 1885. Other accounts have been equally at variance.

WHEN I lived in Guam several years ago I knew an old-timer, Henry Millinchamp, then over eighty years of age, who had cruised around the Pacific a good deal fifty or more years ago and who claimed that he had known Hayes. One of his stories was that around 1890, Hayes, then engaged in aiding Spanish political prisoners to escape from Guam to the Marshalls, Carolines or other islands, had been captured by Spanish soldiers near Ritidian Point (the northernmost point of Guam), been imprisoned for a while, later made a prisoner at large on the island, during which time he had lived with Millinchamp, and then sent to Manila for trial. It was at Manila that Hayes made his famous escape by capturing a schooner single-handed and sailing out of the harbor with the aid of the ship's cook and the skipper's wife.

Now it is obvious that Hayes could not have been born in 1812 and have been active in Guam around 1890. Do you know his true history? It would make most interesting reading and I am sure all Camp-fire followers would enjoy an article giving the correct story. Sometimes I wonder if there could have been two men named Hayes, the second of whom followed somewhat in the footsteps of the first and inherited his nickname of "Bully". After a lapse of years and with such a dearth of written records, it would be easy for the present generation to confuse the two and gain the impression that they were one and the same person. This, of course, is just a wild guess.

DO YOU know if anyone has ever written a book about the Pacific pirates, not only Hayes but also Williams, O'Keefe and the rest? While in Guam I heard that O'Keefe once ran a trading store there, but was unable to get verification of the story. While all those old-timers did a lot of their marauding south of the line, there is no question but that they also visited Guam and the rest of the Marianas, the Bonin Islands, etc. I know that Millinchamp, who was born in the Bonins, ran a trading schooner in that part of the world for some years.

A good book on the subject would be fascinating. Has Gordon Young ever considered it? He seems to know a great deal about the subject. The purpose of this letter is to get some sort of a discussion started. There are a few old-timers still alive, but another ten years may be too late.

—PAUL J. SEARLES.

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Cruise

FROM Saginaw to Seattle by way of the Great Lakes, Mississippi River and Panama Canal. It's feasible, but the metal hulled boat will require careful checking before hitting salt water.

Request:—"I contemplate a trip, by water, from here to Seattle, Washington, and would like some information and advice.

Course, Saginaw to Chicago via Lakes Huron and Michigan, Chicago Drainage Canal and Illinois River to Mississippi River, Gulf of Mexico, Panama Canal and up the West Coast to Seattle.

Boat, regulation 22-foot steel lifeboat used on Great Lakes freighters. Marconi sail; converted Ford motor.

I'll build a cabin on this hull and deck it over, so she won't ship any water if it gets dusty.

These are the things I'd like to know:

1. Can I get a boat of this size, with mast up, down the canal and Illinois River?

2. How would this hull stand up in salt water? (All the fittings I use will be either brass or Monel.)

3. How much canvas, height of mast and length of boom? Where shall I step the mast? I don't care to try to make a racing outfit out of this; just a sensible working sail that I can handle alone.

4. How deep a keel will I need, and how much ballast? Cabin, motor and fittings will weigh about 750 pounds. I'll put the gas tanks, 100 gallons, as low as I can.

This certainly is a man-size order. I haven't missed a copy of *Adventure* since July, 1916. This is the first time I've used the Ask Adventure section and I'm making up for all those years at one crack."

—H. B. LOVETTE, Saginaw, Michigan

Reply, by Mr. A. R. Knauer:—I will endeavor to answer your questions as enumerated.

1. Be sure the route between Chicago and Peoria is open, as I understand it is practically impassable at present due to certain waterway improvements now in progress.

2. Your choice of boats does not particularly appeal to me, as a wood boat would be easier to repair in out of the way places and it would probably be more seaworthy also; a better designed boat such as the yawl *Seabird* could be used as a centerboard to New Orleans and then a wooden keel could easily be added. The Ford motor might be O.K. *if* it were a real marine conversion. I favor real marine motors for boats especially, but lots of Ford conversions are giving excellent service.

3. You would have to take your mast out at Chicago, but could restep it probably before you arrive at St. Louis, from which point you could do some sailing without overhead obstructions.

The galvanized hull might stand up *if* it were properly treated when built. Using brass against iron would soon finish it up due to electrolytic action caused by salt water. An old boat would be

inclined to have deteriorated some before getting into your hands and salt water would soon finish it. See reply to second question.

Your choice of boat would be a poor sailer, but I would suggest about 200 to 225 square feet of canvas. A jib headed rig with a small jib. Use a 15 ft. mast with about 13 ft. of boom. The spar should be stepped approximately one-third the distance from the bow.

4. A fin keel would be impractical without rebuilding. I would suggest rather an addition to the present keel, such as a 2″ x 6″ of oak to keep you from making too much leeway. This would make her very slow in stays, but would not bother you much on a trip of this kind. You might put some lead on this addition or preferably an iron shoe of 250 or 300 lbs. weight, as your other equipment would bring your water line down considerably.

There are some long jumps before Panama, and from Panama to California, which would need considerable investigation and planning. Your trip is, I believe, perfectly feasible if your equipment is the proper type.

Armor

AND the longest sword on record. Konrad Schenck de Wintertettin, with his eight-foot blade, a picturesque knight of old Swabia.

Request:—"1. Could you tell me if the Maltese Cross was worn on the shields of the Knights of Malta? Did the various knightly orders have something to distinguish them, such as crosses, etc.?

2. I have read that armor made in Milan would turn arrows which would penetrate many other makes. Why was that? Did the Milan armorers use steel?

3. What is the largest sword you ever heard of? Is it still in existence?"

—JOSEPH SHIELDS, Auburn, New York

Reply, by Mr. R. E. Gardner:—1. The Knights of Malta, who were also known as Knights of St. John and Knights of Rhodes, belonged to the Order of Hospitalers. This order was founded about 1048 at Jerusalem, but it was not until Malta came into the power of Charles V (1530) that they became known as Knights of Malta. The cross of the Roman church was displayed by most of the Crusaders, usually upon surcoat, shield or pennant. I am not qualified to treat of the heraldic device used by the various orders of knighthood, but am of the opinion that those of the Crusaders who possessed embellished armor—i. e. engraved, etched or embossed—bore, if any, the device of their house or the lord to whom they owed allegiance.

2. Milanese armor has always been considered of the finest. The work of the armorer families, Missaglia and Negroli, (XV and XVI centuries) is the costliest and most sought after armor in the great collections of the day. The Italian craftsmen did not possess a corner on fine defensive armor, however. Armor produced by the Germanic craftsmen ranked equally with that of Milan. A few notes relative to the leading armorers of the period may be of interest.

Tomaso do Missaglia of Milan enjoyed the patronage of the greatest nobles of his day. He worked from about 1430 until his death in 1469. Antonio, son and successor of Tomaso, was likewise enriched and favored by the great. Antonio was born about 1430 and died shortly after 1492. Philippus Jacobi Negroli of Milan is called the "Michelangelo of Armorers." As *objets d'art* his work stands preeminent. Philippus was born about 1500 and died 1561. He received many commissions from the Emperor Charles V and worked also for the Duke of Urbino.

I do not believe the fine craftsmen of Central Europe quite approached the artistic merit of Philippus Negroli, but considered otherwise, no armorer produced finer defensive armor than the family Kolman of Augsburg, Hans Gruenwalt of Nuremburg, Anton Peffenhauser of Augsburg, Wolf of Landshut and others. They were famed masters of their day and received commissions from such figures as Emperor Charles V, King Sebastian of Portugal, Philip II of Spain, the Electors of Saxony, Christian I, Christian II, Johann Georg I, and William of Bavaria.

3. The largest sword of which I have record is that which belonged to a Swabian knight, Konrad Schenck de Wintertettin (1209-1240). This single-handed weapon is eight feet two inches in length; blade four inches wide and pommel four inches in diameter. This piece is preserved in the Museum at Dresden.

Gasoline

THE danger of filtering your fuel through chamois, which often produces static electricity. Hint: If you must do it, ground your funnel.

Request:—"I would like to take issue with you concerning a statement in *Adventure* for February 1. You say that a screen will not separate water from gasoline. This may be true of the type of screens used in filling stations, but it depends on the fineness of the mesh.

In chemical work I used to use a set of sieves graded from 10 mesh to 300 mesh. By 10 mesh is meant a screen having 10 meshes to the linear inch, 100 to the square inch, while a 300 mesh sieve would have 90,000 meshes to the square inch. The set I had—of the older type, not the new logarithmic sieves—ran 10, 20, 30, 40, 60, 80, 100, 150, 200, 300 mesh. I found that anything finer than 80 mesh would allow the gasoline to pass while the water was retained. With the 80 mesh, if the screen was first wet with kerosene it would retain the water; if not, it would let the first of the water through until

the meshes were thoroughly wet with gasoline.

I used a lot of gasoline for pressure burners in assaying furnaces, buying it by the barrel—and I hate to think what I paid for some of it, in Arizona—and found water in every barrel. I could siphon about ¾ of the barrel without trouble, but the rest usually had to be screened, and I found the 100 mesh the best for this. Later I used to put a few pieces of calcium carbide in each barrel when received, which would react with the water, forming acetylene. The sludge in the bottom of the barrel I set aside until enough was on hand to justify distilling the gasoline off.

I am aware that this would not be practicable when the gasoline is to be used as motor fuel. Indeed, the matter is only academic, as the chamois filtration is good enough for ordinary uses, if you don't happen to be in a region where static electricity is high, as in the dry desert country, or in the mountains. Because under conditions of low humidity it has happened that the pouring of gasoline through chamois creates enough static to give off sparks, igniting the gasoline. I know this from my own experience. Static electricity in arid regions is a very troublesome thing. And snapping, shocking sparks an inch long often accompany such innocent occupations as making beds, putting fuel in stoves, even walking across a rug and then touching metal. And it plays hob with the chemist's delicate balances, until he learns to ground everything.

In regions where the humidity is high, the chamois filter can be used safely, until the temperature gets down around zero; then look out for sparks. But in arid lands it is not safe."

—CHARLES E. ROE, Hudson, Massachusetts

Reply, by Mr. Edmund B. Neil:—In discussing the passage of water through screens, I was, of course, talking about the effectiveness of commercial filters now on the market, rather than to say that a screen could not prevent the flow of water through it. You are quite right that screens having meshes in the order of 100 will prevent the flow of water when mixed with gasoline or kerosene, although the fact that in some automobiles a pressure of several pounds is placed on the fuel may have a small effect upon determining exactly what size can be considered the largest (lowest number of meshes) which would effectively prevent the flow of fuel, However, automobile manufacturers have practically given up the use of fine mesh screens in filters, due, I understand, to the fragile nature of the screen itself, combined with the fact that the mild corrosive action in the fuel has a tendency to disintegrate the material.

You are quite right in that fine mesh screens are regularly used in chemical work for the separation of fluids, also that there is danger from static electricity when chamois is used as a filtering medium. However, as you undoubtedly know, much of the difficulty from static discharges has been eliminated by the use of grounding wires or chains from the funnel to the body of the vehicle or earth during the time the fuel is being poured through the chamois. Even here in the East on hot dry days static discharges have been known to take place in filling the gasoline tanks of cars through chamois attached in the funnel. I personally know of one case where fire resulted from this cause. Most gasoline tank trucks drag a heavy chain along the ground behind them, with the idea that the chain will carry off any static accumulations developed within the vehicle either from stray ignition current discharges or from friction of the fuel in the supply tanks.

Thank you most kindly for your criticism of my reply to Mr. Halker, and I stand corrected on the academic question as outlined in your letter. At the same time, I am personally pleased that interest in a technical question of this kind has resulted from the appearance of a letter in *Adventure.* Quite often the inquiries and replies given are quite technical, hence seldom are suitable for publication.

Orient

KEEP away from the electric fan when you are overheated; don't think too much about plague and smallpox as you wander through the bazaars, and the chances are that you will live as long in Singapore as in New York.

Request:—"I am planning to go to Singapore in the British Straits Settlements during the coming month and I would greatly appreciate information in regard to health conditions in the city and necessary precautions, inoculations, etc. Is the tsetse fly found there? How is cholera transmitted from one person to another?"

—J. ADRIAN DUMELL, Middletown, New York

Reply, by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—What a weird idea you have about Singapore! Man, that is a great modern city with honest-to-god houses an' all. Physicians, hospitals, and a sanitary commission. Tropical diseases do exist, of course. But thousands of white men, women and children live in the Settlements and don't die much more frequently than in most other places. What newcomers have to look out for is to guard against their own foolishness. They must realize that they can't take chances as they would at home. For the first six months or so a newcomer is better able to resist sickness than a resident, for the reason that he has brought with him a greater vitality than is possessed by the resident in any tropical climate.

If any particularly virulent epidemic is going around when you get there, then will be the time to take any inoculations that the local doctors prescribe. If smallpox happens to be doing more business than usual, your steamship company will warn you in plenty of time to get vaccinated.

Smallpox, cholera and bubonic plague are likely to be sporadic in any tropical town at any time. It is only in America that we throw fits when a single case is reported on some ship at New

Orleans. If you go to live in the tropics you will walk through streets and will shop in bazaars where any one, or all three, of these diseases exist and you won't remember to think about them.

There are no tsetse flies in any part of Asia, but there are plenty of things just as good. Cholera is not transmitted from person to person; it is a contamination disease; and in that respect, if one wants to quibble over words, it may be said to be transmitted from person to person.

Don't bother about sickness.

And don't sit sweating right under an electric fan; because that's asking for trouble. Depending upon your individual idiosyncrasy, you may find it advisable to wear a cholera belt. I can't tell you about that.

Pottery

CACTUS wine, or *tizwin,* a ceremonial beverage of the Papago Indians, is brewed in native jars. But the jars receive no consideration after the drinking ceremony is over. They're sold to tourists.

Request:—"I am interested in Indian pottery, especially that produced by the Yaqui Indians of Mexico.

I would greatly appreciate any information that you would be kind enough to furnish me relative to same.

Would like to know their method of manufacture, what tools they use, the manner in which they apply the dyes, and if they make their own dyes.

Also if the various forms are symbolical of anything in particular pertaining to their religious and tribal rites."

—MRS. F. W. BRINK, New Orleans, Louisiana

Reply, by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—It so happens that you have selected a tribe concerning which very little ethnological data is available. Although in their native state in Mexico they may have manufactured pottery, observers fail to report it.

Since 1913 however a community of Yaqui Indians have resided near Tucson and it has been reported that these people manufacture a crude sort of pottery. I presume they learned this art from the Papago in the neighborhood, that being Papago territory. The Yaqui lived near Tucson many years before 1913, but it wasn't until after that year that any sort of community life was maintained by them.

In general the pottery made in the southern part of Arizona and northern Sonora by the Indians today is a rather crude, heavy, porous ware, dark red in color and decorated in a crude manner.

The Papago use a combination of mesquite gum and a small quantity of powdered hematite. At times the gum alone is used. This combination gives a dark reddish brown paint which fires almost black. The designs are generally simple geometric patterns or rude representations of men, lizards and *sahuaro* cacti. Occasionally one finds pots which are covered with designs copied from fragments of vessels picked up near old Hohokam village sites. In general, Papago pottery, as well as all of the pottery in the Southwest, beyond the Pueblo area, is rather crudely done. Of all the desert dwellers in that area, the Maricopa make the best pottery. The chief beauty of their ware however lies in the fine polish rather than the line work of the decorative motifs.

The large *ollas* used by the Papago and traded by them to the white men and other Indian tribes nearby are principally water *ollas,* although at certain seasons of the year the Papago brew *tizwin,* a cactus wine, in these earthen jars, later serving the liquid ceremonially from large baskets.

As far as I know, the various *ollas,* or large jars, ladles, cooking vessels, etc. have no definite symbolic meaning. The *tizwin ollas* are of various sizes and receive no apparent consideration after the ceremony is over. Neither do the baskets.

Bird Dog

NO ONE can look at a litter of English setter pups and predict which will be the finest dog at the end of a year.

Request:—"My setter bird dog has eight pups, and I want to find out if they are pure bird-dog pups. The dog is not registered, but I was told by the man I bought her from that she was an Irish and English. The sire of the pups (the dog I thought was the sire) is a registered dog and an English setter, or that is what his owner thinks. Now neither dog has a black spot on it, my dog having red spots, and the other is all white save for one scarcely noticeable lemon spot on an ear, yet five of the pups have black ears and a black spot or two on the neck, two having a single black spot at the root of the tail.

I would like to sell the pups, but I do not want to sell them for bird-dogs if there is a chance that they are not. Three of them show all the markings of the kind of pups I would expect from the two dogs. What is your opinion? Is there any way to tell for sure? The pups are a week old now and I am willing to keep them a good while to find out if they are bird-dogs."

—JOS. M. ROBINSON, Van Wyck, South Carolina

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—You can not do anything but guess in crossbred dogs. You will have to wait and see how the animals grow up. Often pure bred English setter sires throw different colors from what they are. I have the stud dog, Winmospeck. He is white, black and tan, yet two-thirds of his pups got with any color

bitch are orange and white.

As the dogs grow up, the conformation and size will tell you more than colors. English setters may throw white, black and tan, orange and white, white and black, or lemon and white. Often some ancestor a short distance back atavistically controls the colors.

North Canada

HALFWAY to the Arctic the price of gasoline hits $3.50 a gallon, and a plane becomes more economical than a canoe.

Request:—"Barring the unexpected, two of us are hoping to spend about three months in Canada in a canoe.

The Liard and Mackenzie Rivers attract us. We would like to start from the Pacific Coast side and finish some place so as to be near Jasper Park at the end. We would outfit in Canada. Is gasoline available on the Mackenzie River for an outboard?"

MERRILL A. MILLER, Los Angeles, California

Reply, by Mr. Lionel H. G. Moore:—I have refrained from replying to your letter of several weeks ago until I was in possession of the very latest data in connection with the trip you and your friend anticipate making.

In order to get accurate information for such a strenuous trip I wrote to two friends of mine who are thoroughly conversant with the conditions to be met. I am enclosing copies of their replies and you may absolutely rely upon the information therein contained.

The names and addresses of my informants are:—Ex-Sergeant H. Thorne, Jasper, Alberta, and Donald Phillips, Guide and Outfitter, Jasper Park, Alberta, and either of these gentlemen would be only too willing to give you any further information you may desire:

From the Pacific Coast to Jasper Park: Take a steamer up the Pacific Coast to Port Essington, then by canoe up the Skeena River to Hazleton, then it is necessary to take the Canadian National Ry. to Prince George, then portage by car or truck to Summit Lake, go down the Crooked River to the Parsnip River and continue on to the Peace River, portage at Hudsons Hope fourteen miles, and continue on the Peace River to its mouth. Then over the Slave River Portage (sixteen miles) to Fort Fitzgerald, then continue down the Slave River to Great Slave Lake, cross the Lake to the Mackenzie River, and continue on this river to Fort Simpson, then go up the Liard River (there are rapids twenty miles long, twenty miles from Fort Simpson, but these can be negotiated with care as far as Fort Liard if you care to do so), then return to Fort Simpson and return up the Mackenzie River to Great Slave Lake, and the Slave River to Lake Athabasca, then up the Athabasca River to Fort McMurray, the end of steel. The journey could be continued but would be difficult and tedious up the Athabasca River to Jasper Park. It is suggested that the train be taken at Fort McMurray to Jasper Park via Edmonton.

Gasoline may be obtained at any of the Posts on the Mackenzie, Peace and Lakes; these posts are approximately two hundred miles apart. Mosquitoes will in places be bad. There will be no civilization after leaving Prince George until you arrive at Fort McMurray, with the exception of Peace River.

The trip will have plenty of adventure, and it will be necessary to make inquiries before leaving any post with regard to rapids ahead, portages, etc.

From Jasper Park to the Pacific Coast: Starting from Jasper it is about six hundred miles on the Athabasca River to Fort McMurray. In places the water is very fast, and it is next to impossible to make any headway against the current, even with an engine and paddles. The first two hundred miles are mostly rapids and fast water, then the rapids get less frequent until you arrive at Pelican Rapids, then the next hundred miles toward McMurray are nearly all bad rapids, most of which have to be portaged, but by starting from Jasper you would have a lighter load by the time you arrived at McMurray, where you could re-outfit, as it is the end of the steel on the Alberta and Great Waterways Ry.

AT THE junction of the Athabasca and Peace Rivers a cache of gas and supplies should be left sufficient to reach Peace River crossing 600 miles up the river for the return trip. The Peace being a river with few rapids and comparatively slow water, it is practical to use it as return route to civilization, returning to Prince George, via the Peace, Parsnip, Pack and Crooked Rivers, an upstream trip of 1100 miles. Below the junction of the Peace and Athabasca Rivers, you would follow the Slave River to Fitzgerald, a distance of 60 miles, and then portage over to Fort Smith 16 miles by truck.

It is approximately 200 miles to Great Slave Lake from Fort Smith, and this lake is 325 miles long. It would be a good idea to visit Hay River post, and go up the Hay River, 80 miles to Alexandria Falls, and also take a trip to the east end of the lake to old Fort Reliance; it is big water, but the big stretches can be taken in fine weather, by dodging from one island to another.

At Hay River Post, or Fort Providence, the traveler could catch one of the airplanes carrying mail to Aklavik, and fly the last thousand miles down to the Arctic, and back in two or three days, making short stops at all the trading posts en route. It would cost only a fraction of what it would cost by canoe and engine.

The Liard River is practically out of the question, as there are several miles of it above the junction with the Nelson, that are all bad rapids,

and cañons, with frequent portages of from one to four miles, one of the four mile portages being over a mountain 1600 feet high. There is a drop of 1600 feet in this river between the mouth of the Dease, and the foot of Devils Cañon, above Fort Liard, and another 20 miles of rapids just above Fort Simpson, which is only navigable in high water.

IT IS absolutely necessary to have big freight canoes for this trip, as the traveling is dangerous, especially in the rapids; it is also necessary to have experienced boatmen, two in number. These can be hired for about $150.00 to $180.00 and board per month. On the Peace, Slave and Athabasca from the lake to McMurray, one boatman would be sufficient, as there are only three bad rapids, and these have to be lined, and are short, but the upper Athabasca, Hay, Berland and Wabiska have many long bad rapids that should only be attempted by experienced men.

Gasoline at Hudsons Hope, Port McLeod and Fort Vermillion on the Peace is roughly $1.00 per gallon and oil $3.00 or $4.00. At Resolution on Great Slave Lake gas is $2.50, and at Fort Simpson $3.50 per gallon, and that is only a little better than halfway to the Arctic.

To start on a three months' trip with steady travel in the North, is going to cost quite a little money, any way you go, as prices of everything go up by leaps and bounds as you get farther away from civilization. It is quite easy to look at the map and say it must be wonderful to go down to the mouth of the Mackenzie and back, and it is, but it is two thousand miles straight away from civilization. Going downstream all the time, and with a good "kicker," and a comfortable sized canoe, you could do it in a month of steady hard travel, but to come back against the current is a different story.

I could not give a figure for a three months' trip; it would depend on the route taken, and how much upstream work there would be, and how far north the people wanted to go, but approximately, with two boatmen, one big power canoe, complete camping equipment, food, gas, and a spare engine, and all transportation charges, it would not be much short of one thousand dollars per month. A couple of extra passengers would not cost any more, and would split the cost of the trip. Sergeant "Nitchi" Thorne (late of the R. C. M. P.) would be a good second man to have on a trip north, as he has spent the last twenty years there on police detachments, knows everybody, and would be able to get little favors en route, that strangers would not be able to get. He also knows all the interesting characters that would help to make the trip interesting.

At Fitzgerald you will be stopped by the Mounted Police, at the boundary of the Northwest Territories, and you have to satisfy them that you are properly equipped, and with sufficient supplies, or funds, to make the trip into the North and back, or they will not allow you permission to proceed any farther. You are classed as an explorer beyond Fitzgerald, and have to show that you will not become a burden on the population of the interior.

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